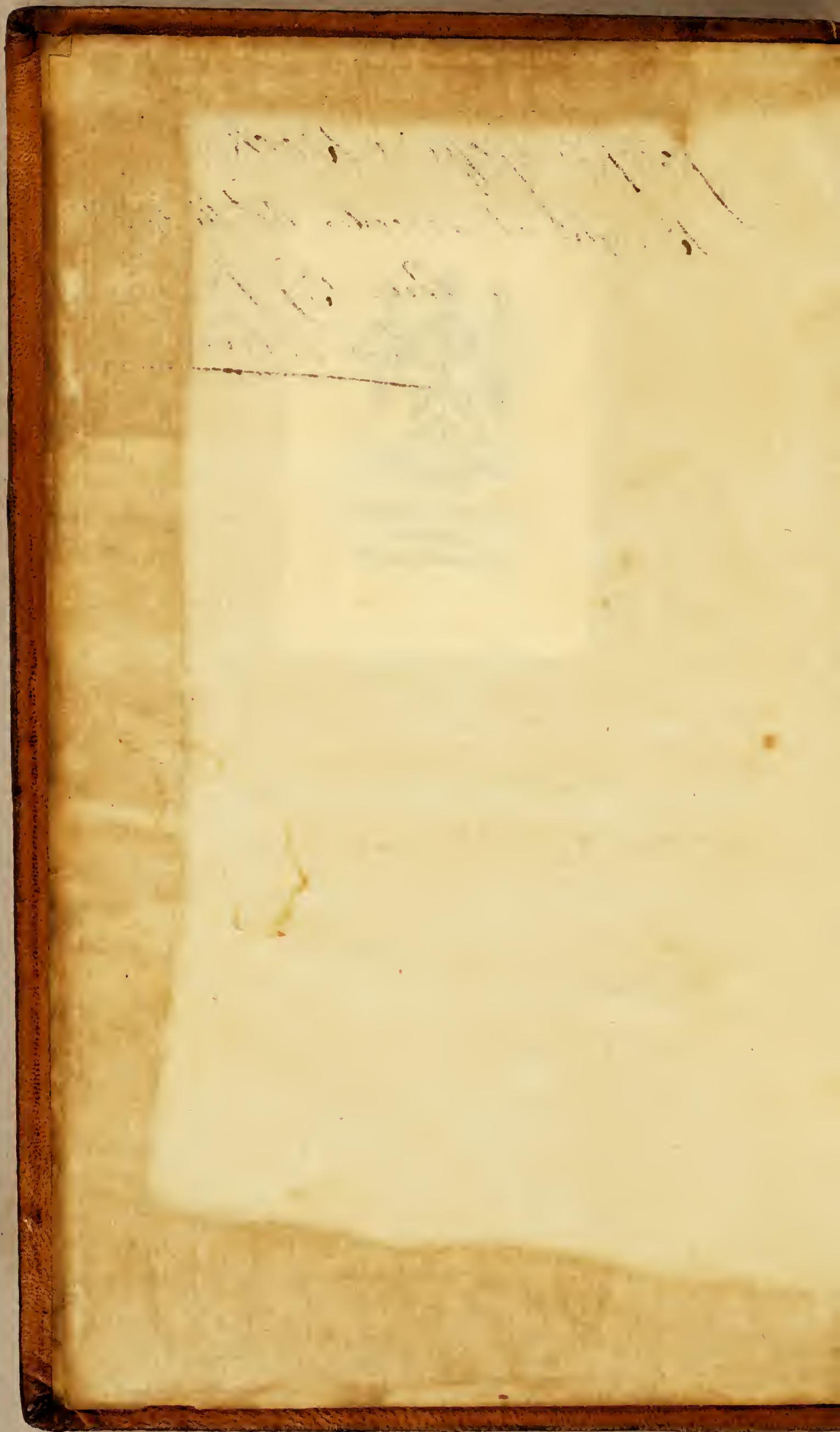


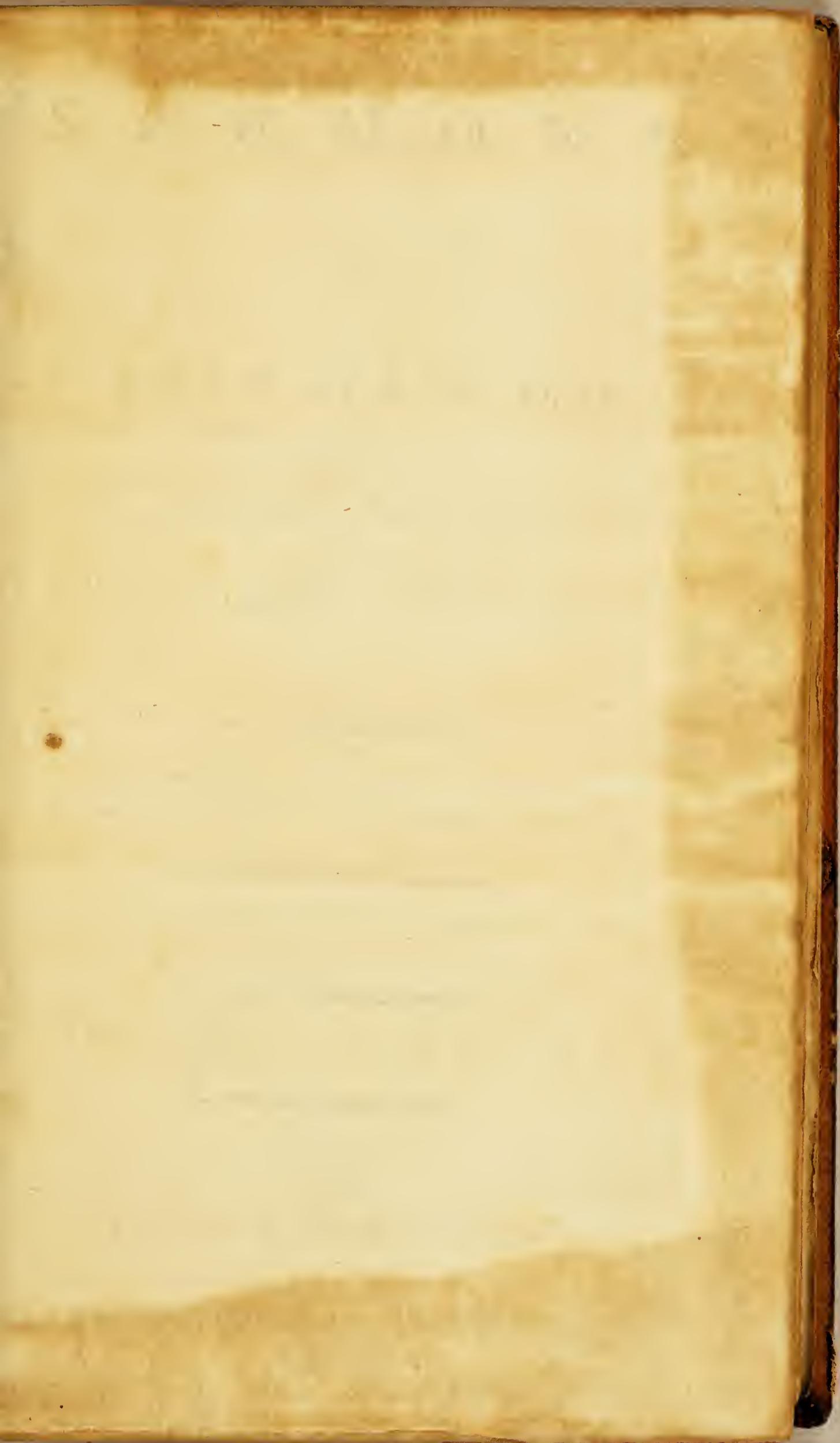
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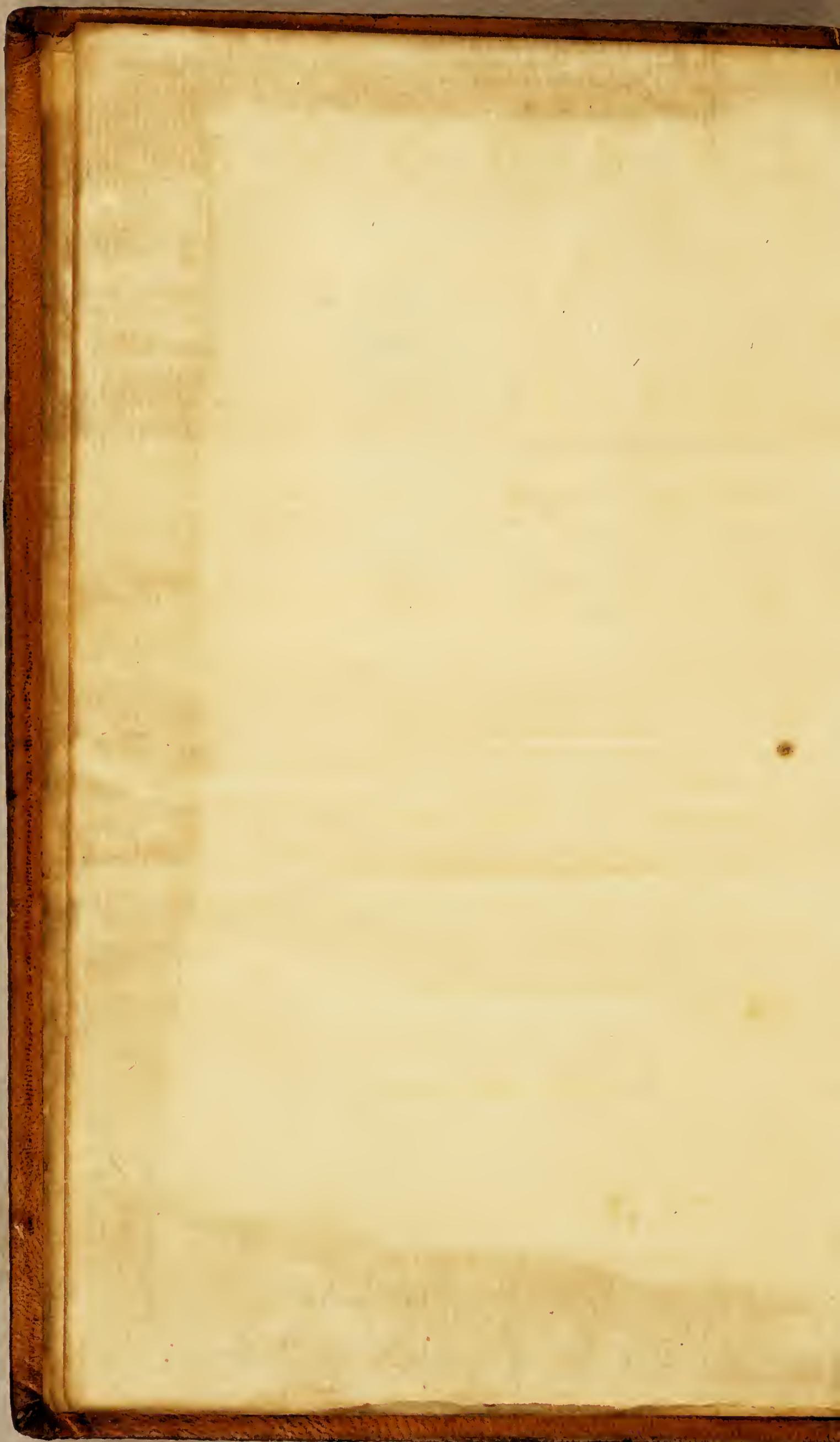


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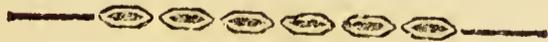
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VOLUME THE SECOND.



PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED BY AND FOR
W. SPOTSWOOD, AND CAREY, STEWART AND CO.
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RPJCB

S E R M O N X X I I I .

On D E A T H .

PSALM xxiii. 4.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

THIS psalm exhibits the pleasing picture of a pious man rejoicing in the goodness of heaven. He looks around him on his state; and his heart overflows with gratitude. When he reviews the past part of his life, he contemplates God as his shepherd, who hath made him lie down in green pastures, and led him beside the still waters. When he considers the present, he beholds his divine benefactor preparing a table for him in the presence of his enemies, and making his cup run over. When he looks forward to the future, he confides in the same goodness, as continuing to follow him all the days of his life, and bringing him to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Amidst these images of tranquillity and happiness, one object presents itself, which is sufficient to overcast the minds, and to damp the joy of the greatest part of men; that is, the approach of death. But on the psalmist it produced no such effect. With perfect composure and serenity, he looks forward to the time when he is to pass through *the valley of the shadow of death*. The prospect, instead of dejecting him, appears to heighten his triumph, by that security which the presence of his Almighty Guardian afforded him. *I will fear no evil for thou art with me*: and pursuing the allusion, with which he had begun,

exults in the hope, that the shepherd, who had hitherto conducted him, would support him with his *staff*, while he passed through that dark and perilous region, with his rod, or pastoral crook, would guard him from every danger.

Such is the happy distinction which good men enjoy, in a situation the most formidable to human nature. That threatening spectre, which appalls others, carries no terror to them. While worldly men are justly said, *through fear of death, to be all their life-time subject to bondage*, to the righteous only it belongs to look on death, and smile. Since then it is in the power of religion to confer upon us so high a privilege, let us adventure to contemplate steadily this last foe, whom we must all encounter. Let us consider what death is in itself, and by what means good men are enabled to meet it with fortitude. Though the subject may be reckoned gloomy, it must be admitted to be interesting. The close of life is a solemn and important event, to which every wise man will have regard in the general tenor of his conduct. No one can act his part with propriety, who considers not how it is to terminate: and to exclude from our thoughts what we cannot prevent from actually taking place, is the refuge of none but the timorous and weak. We are more encouraged to enter on this meditation, by reflecting on the superior advantages which, as christians, we enjoy for overcoming the fear of death, beyond that holy man whose sentiment is now before us. Those great objects, which he beheld through the medium of types and figures, are clearly revealed to us. That dispensation of grace, which in his days began to open, is now completed. That life and immortality, which then only dawned on the world, have now shone forth with full light and splendor.

Death may be considered in three views: as the separation of the soul from the body; as the con-

clusion of the present life; as the entrance into a new state of existence. In the first view, it is regarded as painful and agonizing. In the second, it is melancholy and dejecting. In the third, it is awful and alarming. One of the first enquiries, which occurs concerning it, is, for what purposes it was clothed with all these terrors? Why, under the government of a gracious Being, the termination of life was loaded with so much sorrow and distress? We know, that, in consequence of the fall, death was inflicted as a punishment upon the human race. But no unnecessary severities are exercised by God: and the wisdom and goodness of the divine plan will be much illustrated, by observing that, all the formidable circumstances, which attend death, are, in the present situation of mankind, absolutely requisite to the proper government of the world. The terrors of death are, in fact, the great guardians of life. They excite in every individual, that desire of self-preservation, which is nature's first law. They reconcile him to bear the distresses of life with patience. They prompt him to undergo its useful and necessary labours with alacrity; and they restrain him from many of those evil courses, by which his safety would be endangered. While they are in so many respects beneficial to the individual, they are, at the same time, the safeguard of society. If death were not dreaded and abhorred as it is by men, no public order could be preserved in the world. The sword of authority were lifted up in vain. The sanctions of law would lose their effect. The scaffold and the executioner would be derided; and the violent left to trample, unrestrained, on the rights of the peaceful. If, notwithstanding the restraints which self-preservation imposes, society is so often disturbed by the crimes of the wicked, what a scene of confusion would it become, if capital punishments, which are the last resource

of government, were of no influence to deter offenders?

For such important ends the conclusion of life has, by the appointment of Providence, been made an awful object. The valley of death has been planted with terrors to the apprehension of men. Here, as in many other instances, what seemed at first to arraign the goodness of the Deity, is, upon enquiry, found to confirm it. But though, for the most salutary purposes, it was requisite, that the fear of death should be a powerful principle in human nature, yet like our other propensities, it is apt, when left to itself, to run into excess. Over many it usurps such an ascendant, as to debase their character, and to defeat the chief ends of living. To preserve it within such bounds, that it shall not interrupt us in performing the proper offices and duties of life, is the distinction of the brave man above the coward: and to surmount it in such a degree, that it shall not, even in near prospect, deject our spirit, or trouble our peace, is the great preference which virtue enjoys above guilt. It has been the study of the wise and reflecting, in every age, to attain this steadiness of mind. Philosophy pursued it, as its chief object; and professed, that the great end of its discipline was, to enable its votaries to conquer the fear of death. Let us, then, before we have recourse to the more powerful aid of religion, hearken for a little to what reason has suggested on this subject. Her assistance may, perhaps, be not entirely despicable: and though the armour which she offers, be not completely of proof, it may serve, however to turn aside, or to blunt, some of the shafts which are aimed against us by the last foe.

After this manner she may be supposed to address mankind, in order to reconcile them to their fate. Children of men! it is well known to you that you are a mortal race. Death is the law of your nature

—the tribute of your being—the debt which all are bound to pay. On these terms you received life, that you should be ready to give it up, when Providence calls you to make room for others, who, in like manner, when their time is come, shall follow you. He, who is unwilling to submit to death, when heaven decrees it, deserves not to have lived. You might as reasonably complain, that you did not live before the time appointed for your coming into the world, as lament that you are not to live longer, when the period of your quitting it is arrived. What divine Providence hath made necessary, human prudence ought to comply with cheerfully. Submit at any rate you must: and is it not much better to follow of your own accord, than to be dragged reluctantly, and by force? What privilege have you to plead, or what reason to urge, why you should possess an exemption from the common doom? All things around you are mortal and perishing. Cities, states, and empires have their period set. The proudest monuments of human art moulder into dust. Even the works of nature wax old and decay. In the midst of this universal tendency to change, could you expect, that to your frame alone a permanent duration should be given? All, who have gone before you, have submitted to the stroke of death. All, who are to come after you, shall undergo the same fate. The great and the good, the prince and the peasant, the renowned and the obscure, travel alike the road which leads to the grave. At the moment when you expire, thousands, throughout the world, shall, together with you, be yielding up their breath. Can that be held a great calamity which is common to you with every thing that lives on earth—which is an event as much according to the course of nature, as it is that leaves should fall in autumn, or that fruit should drop from the tree, when it is fully ripe?

The pain of death cannot be very long, and is

probably less severe than what you have at other times experienced. The pomp of death is more terrifying than death itself. It is to the weakness of imagination, that it owes its chief power of dejecting your spirits; for when the force of the mind is roused, there is almost no passion in our nature but what has showed itself able to overcome the fear of death. Honor has defied death; love has despised it; shame has rushed upon it; revenge has disregarded it; grief, a thousand times, has wished for its approach. Is it not strange, that reason and virtue cannot give you strength to surmount that fear, which, even in feeble minds, so many passions have conquered? What inconsistency is there in complaining so much of the evils of life, and being, at the same time, so afraid of what is to terminate them all? Who can tell, whether his future life might not teem with disasters and miseries, as yet unknown, were it to be prolonged according to his wish? At any rate, is it desirable to draw life out to the last dregs, and to wait till old age pour upon you its whole store of diseases and sorrows? You lament, that you are to die: but did you view your situation properly, you would have much greater cause to lament, if you were chained to this life for two or three hundred years, without possibility of release. Expect therefore calmly that which is natural in itself, and which must be fit, because it is the appointment of heaven. Perform your duty as a good subject of the Deity, during the time allotted you; and rejoice, that a period is fixed for your dismissal from the present warfare. Remember, that the slavish dread of death destroys all the comfort of that life which you seek to preserve. Better to undergo the stroke of death at once, than to live in perpetual misery from the fear of dying.

Such discourses as these are specious at least, and plausible. The arguments are not without strength, and ought to produce some effect on a considerate,

reflecting mind. But it is to be suspected, that their effect will be chiefly felt when the mind is calm and at ease; rather when speculating upon death at a distance, than when beholding it at hand. When the critical moment arrives, which places the anxious, trembling soul on the borders of an unknown world, reasonings, drawn from necessity and propriety, will be of small avail, to quiet its alarms. In order to afford relief, you must give it hope; you must promise it protection; you must offer somewhat, on which it can lay hold for support, amidst the struggles of labouring nature. Hence the great importance of those discoveries, which revelation has made, and of those principles, with which it fortifies the heart. To the consideration of these let us next proceed, and observe their superior efficacy for surmounting the fear of death. In order to judge of their importance, it will be proper to take a view of death in each of those lights in which it appears most formidable to mankind.

It may be considered, first, as the termination of our present existence—the final period of all its joys and hopes. The concluding scene of any course of action, in which we have been engaged with pleasure—even the last sight of objects which we have been long accustomed to behold—seldom fails of striking the mind with painful regret. How many circumstances will concur to heighten that regret, when the time comes, of our bidding an eternal adieu to the light of day—to every pursuit which had occupied our attention, as citizens of the world—and to every friend and relation, who had attached our hearts? How dejecting is the thought to the greatest part of men, that the sun shall rise, and the seasons shall return to others, but no more to them; and that, while their neighbours are engaged in the usual affairs of life, they shall be shut up in a dark lonesome mansion, forgotten and cut off from among men, as though they had never

been! *I said, in the cutting off my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave. I am deprived of the residue of my years. I shall not see the Lord again in the land of the living. I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world* *.

Let us now observe, that the dejection, into which we are apt to sink at such a juncture, will bear proportion to the degree of our attachment to the objects which we leave, and to the importance of those resources which remain with us, when they are gone. He, who is taking farewell of a country, through which he had travelled with satisfaction—and he who is driven from his native land, with which he had connected every idea of settlement and comfort—will have very different feelings at the time of departure. Such is the difference, which at the hour of death, takes place between the righteous and the ungodly. The latter knows nothing higher or better than the present state of existence. His interests, his pleasures, his expectations, all centered here. He lived solely for the enjoyments of this world. Dreadful, therefore, and insupportable must be that event which separates him from these for ever. Whereas the culture of religion had previously formed the mind of a christian for a calm and easy transition from this life. It had instructed him in the proper estimate of sublunary happiness. It had set higher prospects before him. It had formed him to a more refined taste of enjoyment, than what the common round of worldly amusements could gratify. It gave him connexions and alliances with spiritual objects, which are unknown to the men of the world. Hence, though he be attached to life by the natural feelings of humanity, he is raised above the weak and unmanly regret of parting with it. He knew, that it was intended as preparatory only to a succeeding state. As

* *Isaiah. xxxviii. 10, 11.*

soon as the season of preparation should be finished, he expected a removal; and when Providence gives the signal, he bids adieu to the world with composed resolution and undisturbed heart.—What though death interrupt him in the middle of his designs, and break off the plans which he had formed, of being useful to his family and the world! all these he leaves with tranquillity in the hands of that Providence, to which he has ever been accustomed to look up with resignation—which governed the world wisely and graciously before he existed—and which, he knows, will continue to govern it with equal wisdom and benignity, when he shall be in it no more. The time of his departure was not left to his own choice: but he believes it to be the most proper, because it is the time chosen by him who cannot err. *Honorable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair to man; and an unspotted life is old age**. When he beholds his friends and relations mourning around him, his heart may melt, but will not be overpowered; for it is relieved by the thought, that he is bidding them only a temporary, not an eternal farewell. He commends them, in the mean time, to the blessing of that God whom he has served; and while he is parting from them, he hears a voice, which sooths his spirit with those comforting words, *Leave thy fatherless children: I will preserve them alive: and let thy widow trust in me †*.

But death is more than the conclusion of human life. It is the gate, which at the same time that it closes on this world, opens into eternity. Under this view, it has often been the subject of terror to the serious and reflecting. The transition they were about to make, was awful. Before them lay a vast undiscovered region, from whose bourn no travel-

* Wisd. of Solomon, iv. 8, 9.

† Jerem. xlix. 11.

ler ever returned, to bring information of the reception which he found, or of the objects which he met with there. The first conception, which suggests itself, is, that the disembodied spirit is to appear before its Creator, who is then to act as its judge. The strict inquisition, which it must undergo—the impartial doom, which it must hear pronounced—and the unalterable state, to which it shall be assigned, are awful forms rising before the imagination. They are ideas which conscience forces upon all. Mankind can neither avoid considering themselves as accountable creatures, nor avoid viewing death as the season when their account is to be given. Such a sentiment is with most men the source of dread—with all men, of anxiety. To a certain degree, a good conscience will convey comfort. The reflexion on a well-spent life makes a wide difference between the last moments of the righteous and the sinner. But whose conscience is so clear, as to strike him with no remorse? Whose righteousness is so unblemished, as to abide the scrutiny of the great searcher of hearts? Who dares rest his everlasting fate upon perfect conformity to the rule of duty throughout the whole of his life?

We must not judge of the sentiments of men at the approach of death, by their ordinary train of thought in the days of health and ease. Their views of moral conduct are then, too generally, superficial: slight excuses satisfy their minds: and the avocations of life prevent their attention from dwelling long on disagreeable subjects. But when, altogether withdrawn from the affairs of the world, they are left to their own reflexions on past conduct—with their spirits enfeebled by disease, and their minds impressed with the terrors of an invisible region—the most resolute are apt to despond, and even the virtuous are in danger of sinking under the remembrance of their errors and frailties. The trembling mind casts every where around an anxious

exploring eye after any power, that can uphold, any mercy, that will shield and save it. And accordingly, we see how eagerly every device has been embraced which superstition could invent, in various countries, for quieting the alarms of the departing spirit.

Here appears the great importance of those discoveries which christianity has made, concerning the government of the universe. It displays the ensigns of grace and clemency. It reveals the Almighty, not as a Creator only and a Judge, but as a compassionate Parent, *who knows our frame, who remembers we are dust, who pities us as a father pitieth his children; and with whom there is forgiveness,* that he may be loved as well as feared. These general views, however, of the divine administration, would not have been sufficient to give full relief, if they had not been confirmed by certain decisive facts, to which the mind can appeal amidst all its doubts and fears. Two such facts the gospel holds forth to us, particularly adapted to the situation of human nature in its greatest extremity; the atonement, and the intercession of Christ. There is no sentiment more natural to men, than this, that guilt must be expiated by suffering. All government is founded on the principle, that public justice requires compensation for crimes: and all religions proceed upon the belief, that, in order to the pardon of the sinner, atonement must be made to the justice of heaven. Hence the endless variety of sacrifices, victims, and expiations, which have filled the earth. The great sacrifice, which our Redeemer offered for guilt, coincides with these natural sentiments of mankind, in giving ease to the heart. It shows us the forfeit of guilt, paid by a divine Personage in our behalf; and allows us to look up to the Governor of the world, as merciful to the guilty, in consistency with justice and order. But still some anxiety might remain, concerning the extension of that mercy to our own case in particular. An invisible Sovereign is

an awful idea. Almighty, unknown power is always formidable, and would be ready to overwhelm the spirit of the feeble, were not an Intercessor with that Sovereign revealed. This Intercessor is one who lived and acted in our own nature; who not only knows, but who experienced our frailty; who has all the feelings of a brother for human infirmity and distress; who himself passed through that *valley of the shadow of death*, which is now opening on us; to whose powerful mediation with his Father, we have every encouragement to commit the charge of our departing spirit.—Such is the provision, which Christianity has made for comforting the last hours of man. The atonement and the intercession of Christ are the refuge of the penitent sinner, and the consolation of the saint. By their means the throne of the universe is encircled with mercy. The cloud, which hung over the invisible world, begins to be dispersed; and hope brightens through the gloom.

But what completes the triumph of good men over death is, the prospect of eternal felicity. This was the great object after which all nations have fought, as the only complete remedy both of the miseries of life and the fears of death. On this the learned and the ignorant, the civilized and the savage tribes of mankind bent their longing eyes; eagerly grasping at every argument, and fondly indulging every hope, that could promise them a propitious Deity, and the prolongation of existence in a happier state. But beyond wishes and feeble expectations, the light of nature could hardly reach. Even the most cultivated, philosophical mind was, at the hour of dissolution, left in painful suspense. Christianity has put an end to all hesitation and doubt on this important subject. It has drawn aside the veil, through which reason essayed to penetrate; and has displayed to full view the future dwellings of the spirits of the just, the mansions of everlasting rest, *the city of*

the living God. Not only has it informed us, that a state of perfect felicity is prepared for the righteous; but it has added to this information a variety of circumstances, which render that state sensible to our imagination, and encouraging to our hopes. It represents it as fully secured by the gracious undertaking of the Saviour of the world. It describes it as *an inheritance*, to which he has given his followers a right and title. He is said to have taken possession of it in their name. He rose from the grave, as *the first fruits of them that sleep*; and under the character of their *fore-runner*, entered into the heavenly regions. *I am the resurrection and the life. He, that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. I give unto my sheep eternal life. I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God* *.

Hence, to those who have lived a virtuous life, and who die in the faith of Christ, the whole aspect of death is changed. Death is to them no longer the tyrant who approaches with his iron rod, but the messenger who brings the tidings of life and liberty. The prospects which open to them, cheer their minds. Even in the valley of death's shade, *green pastures* appear to rise. They view themselves as going forth, not to lie silent and solitary in the darkness of the grave, not to wander forsaken in the wide deserts of the universe, not even to pass into a region where they are altogether strangers and unknown; but to enter on a land, new indeed to sight, but by faith and hope frequented long before; where they shall continue to be under the charge of him who hath hitherto been their guardian, be reunited to many of their ancient and beloved friends, and admitted to join the *innumerable multitude, gathered out of all nations, and tongues, and people, who stand before the throne of God.* They leave behind the dregs of their nature; and exchange this confined and gloomy apartment of the universe, for the glo-

* John, xi. 25. xx. 17.

rious mansions of their Father's house. Blessed surely are the dying in this hope, and *blessed the dead* in this fruition, *resting from their labours, and followed by their works*. Good men are detained at present in the outer court of the temple: Death admits them into the holy place. As yet they sojourn in the territories of pilgrimage and exile: Death brings them home to the native land of Spirits. In this world they are divided from one another, and mingled with the worthless and the vile: Death unites in one assembly all the pure and the just. *In the sight of the universe, they seemed to die, and their departure was taken for utter destruction. But they are in peace. Their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them with the most high* *. O Death! where is now thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory? Where are the terrors, with which thou hast so long affrighted the nations! Where are thy dreary and desolate domains, the haunts of spectres and shades, the abhorred dwellings of darkness and corruption? At the touch of the divine rod, thy visionary horrors have fled. The spell is broken. The dawn of the celestial morning has dispelled thy dismal gloom; and instead of the *habitations of dragons*, appears the paradise of God.

But supposing both the regret of quitting life, and the dread of entering into a future state to be overcome, there is still one circumstance which renders death formidable to many; that is, the shock which nature is apprehending to sustain at the separation of the soul from the body. Formidable I admit, this may justly render it to them whose languishing spirits have no inward fund whence they can then draw relief. Firmness and strength of mind is peculiarly requisite for the support of nature in its last extremity; and that strength is supplied by religion. The testimony of a good conscience, and the remembrance of a virtuous life, a

* Wisdom of Solomon, iii. 2, 3.—v. 15.

well grounded trust in the divine acceptance, and a firm hope of future felicity, are principles sufficient to give composure and fortitude to the heart, even in the midst of agony. In what a high degree they can suspend or alleviate the feelings of pain, has been fully demonstrated by the magnanimous behaviour of such as have suffered death in the cause of conscience and religion. How often has the world beheld them advancing to meet that supposed king of terrors, not with calmness only, but with joy—raised by divine prospects and hopes into an entire neglect and contempt of bodily suffering?

It is not without reason that a peculiar assistance from heaven is looked for by good men at the hour of death. As they are taught to believe, that in all the emergencies of their life, divine goodness has watched over them, they have ground to conclude, that at the last it will not forsake them; but that, at the season when its aid is most needed, it shall be most liberally communicated. Accordingly, a persuasion so congruous to the benignity and compassion of the Father of mercies, has been the comfort of pious men in every age. *My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart. In the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.* When the rod and staff of this Shepherd of Israel are held forth to his expiring servants, declining nature needs no other support. The secret influence of his reviving spirit is sufficient for their consolation and strength, while the painful struggle with mortality lasts; till at length, when the moment arrives, that *the silver cord must be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken*, their Almighty Protector carries off the immortal spirit unhurt by the fall of its earthly tabernacle, and places it in a better mansion.—How respectable and happy is such a conclusion of human life, when one in this manner quits the stage of time, honored and supported with the presence of his Creator, and enjoying, till

the last moment of reflexion, the pleasing thought, that he has not lived in vain! *I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day* *.

After the view, which we have taken, of the advantages possessed by good men for overcoming the fears of death, the first sentiment, which should arise in our minds, is gratitude to heaven for the hopes which we enjoy by means of the Christian religion. How depressed and calamitous was the human condition, as long as the terror of death hung, like a dark cloud, over the inhabitants of the earth; when, after all the toils of life, the melancholy silence of the grave appeared finally to close the scene of existence; or, if a future state opened behind it, that state teemed with all those forms of horror which conscious guilt could suggest to a terrified imagination! The happiest change, which ever took place in the circumstances of the human race, is that produced by the discoveries with which we are blessed, concerning the government of the universe, the redemption of the world, and the future destination of man. How much dignity is thereby added to the human character and state! What light and cheerfulness is introduced into our abode! What eternal praise is due to him, who, *according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven?*

The next effect, which the subject we have considered, should produce, is an earnest desire to acquire those advantages, which good men enjoy at their death. The road, which leads to them, is plain and obvious. A peaceful and happy death is,

* 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

by the appointment of heaven, connected with a holy and virtuous life. Let us renounce criminal pursuits and pleasures; let us fear God and keep his commandments; let us *hold faith and a good conscience*, if we hope for comfort at our last hour. To prepare for this last hour, every wise man should consider as his most important concern. Death may justly be held the test of life. Let a man have supported his character with esteem and applause, as long as he acted on the busy stage of the world—if at the end he sink into dejection and terror, all his former honor is effaced; he departs under the imputation of either a guilty conscience, or a pusillanimous mind. In the other parts of human conduct, disguise and subtlety may impose on the world: but seldom can artifice be supported in the hour of death. The mask most commonly falls off, and the genuine character appears. When we behold the scene of life closed with proper composure and dignity, we naturally infer integrity and fortitude. We are led to believe, that divine assistance supports the soul, and we presage its transition into a happier mansion. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace* *.

The last instruction, which our subject points out, respects the manner in which a wise and good man ought to stand affected towards life and death. He ought not to be severely attached to the one. He has no reason abjectly to dread the other. Life is the gift of God, which he may justly cherish and hold dear. Nay, he is bound by all fair means to guard and preserve it, that he may continue to be useful in that post of duty, where Providence has placed him. But there are higher principles, to which the love of life should remain subordinate. Wherever religion, virtue, or true honor, call him forth to danger, life ought to be hazarded without fear. There is a generous contempt of death,

* Psalm xxxvii. 37.

which should distinguish those who live and walk by the faith of immortality. This is the source of courage in a christian. His behaviour ought to show the elevation of his soul above the present world ; ought to discover the liberty, which he possesses, of following the native sentiments of his mind, without any of those restraints and fetters, which the fear of death imposes on vicious men.

At the same time, this rational contempt of death must carefully be distinguished from that inconsiderate and thoughtless indifference, with which some have affected to treat it. This is what cannot be justified on any principle of reason. Human life is no trifle, which men may play away at their pleasure. Death, in every view, is an important event. It is the most solemn crisis of the human existence. A good man has reason to meet it with a calm and firm mind. But no man is entitled to treat it with ostentatious levity. It calls for manly seriousness of thought. It requires all the recollection of which we are capable ; that with the proper disposition of dependent beings, when the dust is about to *return to its dust*, we may deliver up *the spirit to him who gave it.*

S E R M O N XXIV.

On the HAPPINESS of a FUTURE STATE.

Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

——
REVELAT. vii. 9.

After this I beheld, and, lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

IN this mysterious book of scripture, many revolutions are foretold, which were to take place in the church of God. They are not indeed so foretold, as to afford clear and precise information concerning the time of their coming to pass. It would have been, on many accounts, improper to have lifted up too far that awful veil which covers futurity. The intention of the Spirit of God, was not to gratify the curiosity of the learned, by disclosing to them the fate of monarchies and nations, but to satisfy the serious concerning the general plan, and final issue, of the divine government. Amidst those distresses which beset christians during the first ages, the discoveries made in this book were peculiarly seasonable; as they showed that there was an Almighty Guardian, who watched with particular attention over the interests of the church which he had formed; who foresaw all the commotions which were to happen among the kingdoms of the earth, and would so over-rule them, as to promote, in the end, the cause of truth. This is the chief scope of those mystic visions, with which the apostle John was favoured—of seals opened in heaven—of trumpets sounding—and viols poured forth. The kingdom of darkness was to maintain, for a while, a violent struggle against the kingdom of light. But at the conclusion, a voice was to be heard, *as the voice of many waters and of mighty thunderings, saying,*

*Allelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever *.* Such is the prospect, with which the divine Spirit at intervals enlightens, and with which he finally terminates the many dark and direful scenes that are exhibited in this book. In closing the canon of scripture, he, with great propriety, leaves upon our mind deep impressions of the triumphs of righteousness, and of the blessedness of the redeemed. *After this I beheld, and lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.*

These words present a beautiful description of the happiness of saints in heaven; a subject on which it is, at all times, both comfortable and improving to meditate. On this day, in particular, when we are to commemorate the dying love of our Saviour, we cannot be better employed, than in contemplating what his love had purchased; in order both to awaken our gratitude, and to confirm our attachment to him. The sacrament of the supper is the oath of our fidelity. Let us dispose ourselves for celebrating it, by taking a view of the rewards, which await the faithful. I shall, for this end, in several observations from the words of the text, taken in connexion with the context, endeavour to illustrate, in some imperfect degree, the prospect, which is here afforded us, of a state of future felicity; and then shall make practical improvement of the subject.

I. What the words of the text most obviously suggest, is, that heaven is to be considered as a state of blessed society. *A multitude*, a numerous assembly, are here represented, as sharing together the same felicity and honor. Without society, it is impossible for man to be happy. Place him in a region, where he was surrounded with every pleasure;

* Rev. xix. 6.—xi. 15.

yet there, if he found himself a solitary individual, he would pine and languish. They are not merely our wants, and our mutual dependence, but our native instincts, also, which impel us to associate together. The intercourse, which we here maintain with our fellows, is a source of our chief enjoyments. But, alas! how much are these allayed by a variety of disagreeable circumstances, that enter into all our connexions! sometimes we suffer from the distresses of those whom we love; and sometimes from their vices or frailties. Where friendship is cordial, it is exposed to the wounds of painful sympathy, and to the anguish of violent separation. Where it is so cool, as not to occasion sympathetic pains, it is never productive of much pleasure. The ordinary commerce of the world consists in a circulation of frivolous intercourse, in which the heart has no concern. It is generally insipid, and often soured by the slightest difference in humour, or opposition of interest. We fly to company, in order to be relieved from wearisome correspondence with ourselves: and the vexations, which we meet with in society, drive us back again into solitude. Even among the virtuous, dissentions arise: and disagreement in opinion too often produces alienation of heart. We form few connexions, where somewhat does not occur to disappoint our hopes. The beginnings are often pleasing. We flatter ourselves with having found those, who will never give us any disgust. But weaknesses are too soon discovered. Suspicions arise: and love waxes cold. We are jealous of one another, and accustomed to live in disguise. A studied civility assumes the name, without the pleasure, of friendship: and secret animosity and envy are often concealed under the caresses of dissembled affection.

Hence the pleasure of earthly society, like all our other pleasures, is extremely imperfect; and can give us a very faint conception of the joy, that must arise from the society of perfect spirits in a happier

world. Here, it is with difficulty that we can select, from the corrupted crowd, a few with whom we wish to associate in strict union. There, are assembled all the wise, the holy, and the just, who ever existed in the universe of God—without any distress, to trouble their mutual bliss, or any source of disagreement, to interrupt their perpetual harmony. Artifice and concealment are unknown there. There, no competitors struggle; no factions contend; no rivals supplant each other. The voice of discord never rises, the whisper of suspicion never circulates, among those innocent and benevolent spirits. Each, happy in himself, participates in the happiness of all the rest; and by reciprocal communications of love and friendship, at once receives from, and adds to, the sum of general felicity. Renew the memory of the most affectionate friends, with whom you were blest in any period of your life. Divest them of all those infirmities, which adhere to the human character. Recal the most pleasing and tender moments, which you ever enjoyed in their society: and the remembrance of those sensations may assist you in conceiving that felicity, which is possessed by the saints above. The happiness of *brethren dwelling together in unity*, is, with great justice and beauty, compared by the psalmist to such things as are most refreshing to the heart of man—to the fragrancy of the richest odours—and to the reviving influence of soft ethereal dews. *It is like the precious ointment poured on the head of Aaron; and like the dew of Hermon, even the dew that descendeth on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore* *.

Besides the felicity, which springs from perfect love, there are two circumstances which particularly enhance the blessedness of that *multitude, who stand before the throne*; these are, access to the most exalted society, and renewal of the most tender connexions. The former is pointed out in the scripture, by *joining the innumerable company of angels, and the*

* Psalm cxxxiii. 1.

*general assembly and church of the first-born; by sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven**; a promise, which opens the sublimest prospects to the human mind. It allows good men to entertain the hope, that, separated from all the dregs of the human mass, from that mixed and polluted crowd, in the midst of which they now dwell, they shall be permitted to mingle with prophets, patriarchs, and apostles—with legislators and heroes—with all those great and illustrious spirits, who have shone in former ages as the servants of God, or the benefactors of men—whose deeds we are accustomed to celebrate—whose steps we now follow at a distance—and whose names we pronounce with veneration.

United to this high assembly, the blessed at the same time renew those ancient connexions with virtuous friends, which had been dissolved by death. The prospect of this awakens in the heart the most pleasing and tender sentiment, which perhaps can fill it, in this mortal state. For of all the sorrows, which we are here doomed to endure, none is so bitter as that occasioned by the fatal stroke which separates us, in appearance, for ever, from those to whom either nature or friendship had intimately joined our hearts. Memory, from time to time, renews the anguish; opens the wound which seemed once to have been closed; and, by recalling joys that are past and gone, touches every spring of painful sensibility. In these agonizing moments, how relieving the thought, that the separation is only temporary, not eternal—that there is a time to come, of re-union with those with whom our happiest days were spent—whose joys and sorrows once were ours—and from whom, after we shall have landed on the peaceful shore where they dwell, no revolutions of nature shall ever be able to part us more!—Such is the society of the blessed above.

* Heb. xii. 22. 23. Matth. viii. 11.

Of such are the multitude composed, who *stand before the throne*. Let us now observe,

II. That this is not only a blessed but a numerous society. It is called a *multitude, a great multitude, a great multitude which no man could number*. These expressions convey the most enlarged views of the kingdom of glory. Dismay not yourselves with the apprehension of heaven being a confined and almost inaccessible region, into which it is barely possible for a small handful to gain admission, after making their escape from the general wreck of the human race. *In my Father's house*, said our Saviour, *there are many mansions*. That *city of the living God*, towards which you profess to bend your course, is prepared for the reception of citizens innumerable. It already abounds with inhabitants; and more and more shall be added to it, until the end of time. Whatever difficulties there are in the way which leads to it, they have been often surmounted. The path, though narrow, is neither impassable, nor untrodden. Though the gate stands not so wide as that which opens into hell, yet through the narrow gate multitudes have entered, and been crowned.

It is much to be lamented, that, among all denominations of christians, the uncharitable spirit has prevailed, of unwarrantably circumscribing the terms of divine grace within a narrow circle of their own drawing. The one half of the christian world has often doomed the other, without mercy, to eternal perdition. Without the pale of that church, to which each sect belongs, they seem to hold it impossible for salvation to be attained. But is this the genuine spirit of the gospel? Can a christian believe the effects of the sufferings of Christ to be no greater than these? For this did the Son of God descend from the highest heavens, and pour out his soul unto the death, that only a few, who adopt the same modes of expression, and join in the same forms of worship with us, might be brought to the

kingdom of heaven? Is this all *the deliverance he has wrought upon the earth*? He was with child; he was in pain; and shall not he see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied? Surely, the scripture has given us full ground to conclude, that the trophies of our Redeemer's grace shall correspond to the greatness of his power. *The Captain of our salvation shall bring many sons with himself to glory. The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see his seed; he shall justify many. Men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed.* For our farther encouragement, let us observe,

III. That the heavenly society is represented in the text, as gathered out of all the varieties of the human race. This is intimated by the remarkable expressions of *a multitude which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues*; as if designed on purpose to correct our narrow notions of the extent and power of divine grace. They, whom distant seas and regions now divide, whose languages and manners are at present strange to one another, shall then mingle in the same assembly. No situation is so remote, and no station so unfavourable, as to preclude access to the heavenly felicity. A road is opened by the Divine Spirit to those blisful habitations, from all corners of the earth, and from all conditions of human life; from the peopled city, and from the solitary desert; from the cottages of the poor, and from the palaces of kings; from the dwellings of ignorance and simplicity; and from the regions of science and improvement. *They shall come, says our blessed Lord himself, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God* *.

Such discoveries serve both to enlarge our conceptions of the extent of the divine goodness, and to remove those fears, which are ready to arise from particular situations in life. Were you permitted to draw aside the

* Luke, xiii. 29.

veil, and to view that diversified assembly of the blessed, who surround the throne, you would behold among them numbers who have overcome the same difficulties which encounter you, and which you dread as insuperable. You would behold there, the uninstructed, with whom an upright intention supplied the place of knowledge; the feeble, whom divine grace had strengthened; and the misled, whom it had brought back into the right path. You would behold the young, who had surmounted the allurements of youthful pleasure; and the old, who had borne the distresses of age with undecayed constancy; many, whom want could not tempt to dishonesty; many, whom riches did not seduce into pride or impiety; many, who, in the most difficult and ensnaring circumstances, in the midst of camps, and armies, and corrupted courts, had preserved unsullied integrity. In a word, *from all kindreds and people*, that is, from all ranks of life, and all tribes of men, even from among *publicans and sinners*, you would behold those whom divine assistance had conducted to future glory.—And is not the same assistance, in its full extent, offered also to us? Encompassed, while we run the christian race, with this *cloud of witnesses*, who have finished their course with success—animated, while we *fight the good fight*, with the shouts of those who have overcome, and are crowned—shall despair enervate or deject our minds? From the happy multitude above, there issues a voice which ought to sound perpetually in the ear of faith: *Be ye faithful unto the death, and ye shall receive the crown of life; be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might; be followers of us, who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises.* Consider,

IV. The description, given in the text, of the happiness and glory of the heavenly society. They were beheld by the apostle *standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.* All that these *palms and white robes*

import, it is not given us now to understand. We know, that among all nations, they have been used as ensigns of joy and victory; and are undoubtedly employed here to represent that distinguished felicity and honor, to which human nature shall be then advanced. But we must be endowed with the faculties of the blessed, in order to comprehend their employments and pleasures; and therefore on this part of the subject I shall not attempt to enlarge. The silence of humble and respectful hope better becomes us than the indulgence of those excursions of fancy, which degrade the subject they endeavour to exalt.

One circumstance only cannot fail to attract particular attention; that the blessed are here described, as *standing before the throne and before the Lamb*; that is, enjoying the immediate presence of the great Creator, and of the merciful Redeemer of the world. The unhappy distance, at which we are now removed from God, is the source of all our woes. Those territories, which we inhabit, are not his abode. They are regions of exile. They are the dwellings of a fallen race; and are condemned to be invested with clouds and darkness. Here, God standeth afar off. In vain we often pursue his presence through his works, his ways, and his religious institutions. He is said to be *a God that hideth himself. He dwelleth, as to us, in the secret place of thunder. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth a thick cloud upon it.* The manifestation of his presence shall be the signal for the renovation of all things. When that *Sun of righteousness* breaks forth from the cloud which now conceals him, sorrow, and sin, and every evil thing, shall fly away before the brightness of his face; for neither guilt nor misery can remain where God dwells. As the rising of the sun transforms at once the face of nature, and converts the whole extent of space, over which his beams are spread, into a region of light;

so shall the divine presence, as soon as it is revealed, diffuse universal bliss over all who behold it. It imports *fullness of joy, and pleasure for evermore*. The inspired writer of this book thus describes its effects: *There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain; for the former things are passed away. He that sat upon the throne said, behold I make all things new. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. But the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.* But, descending from this too sublime theme, let us

V. Turn our attention to a circumstance in the state of future happiness, more commensurate to our present conceptions, which is suggested by the commentary upon the words of the text, given in the sequel of the chapter. *And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes; and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation**. This explanatory circumstance may relate particularly to the case of those primitive sufferers, who endured severe persecution in the cause of the gospel. But, in general, it presents this natural and beautiful view of the future felicity of good men, that it is their rest from the troubles and toils of life. For, to all, even to the happiest, human life is tribulation and conflict. No man is thoroughly at ease in his condition. Pursuits succeeding to pursuits, keep us in constant agitation: while frequent returns of disappointment break our plans, and oppress our spirits:—Fatigued by such a variety of toils, mankind have ever looked forward to rest as their favourite object. Throughout all their ranks, from the highest to the lowest, they are in perpetual chase of it; and it perpetually flies before them. It is an object

* Rev. viii. 13, 14.

which here they are doomed always to seek, and never to enjoy.

The nature and laws of our present state admit not the gratification of this favourite wish. For, besides the necessity of trouble, in order to fulfil the purposes of discipline and improvement, our very happiness, such as it is in this world, requires a circulation of labours. Our enjoyment consists in pursuit, not in attainment. Attainment is, with us, for the most part, the grave of pleasure. Had we no object to excite fresh activity, and to impel us to new toils, human life would quickly stagnate in melancholy indolence. At the same time, the current of all our wishes tends to repose. Imaginary forms float incessantly before our view, of the happiness which is to be enjoyed in rest: and from this conflict between our wishes, on the one hand, and our actual situation on the other, arise much of the disquiet, and much of the infelicity, of human life. It is only in heaven that the tranquil repose, which on earth is no more than a pleasing phantom, shall be fully realized. *There, remaineth at last a rest for the people of God*—rest from the disturbance of passion, the vanity of pursuit, and the vexation of disappointment—rest from all the sins and sorrows of this miserable world—rest, which shall not be merely an indolent cessation from labour, but a full and satisfying enjoyment. *Good men shall rest from their labours; and their works shall follow them.* They have come out of great tribulation. They have fulfilled, with honor, their appointed course of trial. They have sat down in the seat of the Conqueror; and of past labours nothing remains but the pleasing review, and the happy fruits. There is still to be considered,

One very material circumstance, descriptive both of the character, and of the happiness, of those who enjoy the heavenly bliss. Not only have *they come out of great tribulation*, but, as the Spirit of God

adds, in explaining the text, *they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb* *. Two things are here suggested; the sanctity of the blessed, and the means by which it is attained.

First, Their sanctity or purity is emblematically described, by their being clothed in *robes which are washed and made white*. In order to qualify human nature for the enjoyment of such happiness as I have endeavoured to describe, it must undergo a change so great, as to receive in Scripture the appellation of *a new birth*; a change to which all the institutions of religion, and all the operations of grace, contribute in this life, but which is not completed till the next. In this sanctity, or regeneration, consist not only the necessary preparations for future felicity, but, which is not so commonly attended to, consists an essential part of that felicity itself. For whence arises the misery of this present world? It is not owing to our cloudy atmosphere, our changing seasons, and inclement skies. It is not owing to the debility of our bodies, or to the unequal distribution of the goods of fortune. Amidst all disadvantages of this kind, a pure, a steadfast, and enlightened mind, possessed of exalted virtue, could enjoy itself in peace, and smile at the impotent assaults of fortune and the elements. It is within ourselves that misery has fixed its seat. Our disordered hearts, our guilty passions, our violent prejudices, and misplaced desires, are the instruments of the torment which we endure. These sharpen the darts which adversity would otherwise point in vain against us. These are the *vials of wrath*, which pour forth plagues on the inhabitants of the earth; and make the dwellings of nations become the abodes of woe. Thence discontent and remorse gnaw the hearts of individuals. Thence society is torn by open violence, or undermined by secret treachery: and man is transformed into a savage to man.

* Rev. viii. 14.

But suppose sin to be banished from the world—suppose perfect purity and charity to descend from heaven, and to animate every human breast;—and you would behold the present habitation of men changed into the paradise of God. The undisturbed enjoyment of a holy mind, and of a blissful union with one another, would scarcely allow us to feel those external evils, of which we now so loudly complain. All nature would assume a different appearance around us. That golden age, which was so long the subject of the philosopher's dream, and of the poet's song, would in fact take place. According to the beautiful language of ancient prophecy, *springs would then rise in the desert, and rivers be opened in the thirsty land. The wilderness and the solitary place would be glad. The wolf would dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid. Judgment would dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The desert would rejoice, and blossom as the rose*—If such, even in this world, would be the effects of innocence and virtue completely restored, how much greater must they be in that *new earth*, and those *new heavens*, where rectitude of nature shall be combined with every circumstance of external felicity? It is the present imperfect state of human virtue, that hinders us from conceiving fully the influence of righteousness upon happiness. The *robes*, in which the best men are now clothed, to use the language of the text, are sullied with so many stains, as to convey no adequate idea of the original beauty which belongs to the garb of righteousness. But when these stains shall be washed away, when these robes shall be made perfectly white and pure, a lustre will flow from them, of which we can, as yet, form no conception.

But how are the robes of the blessed thus washed? Whence is derived that spotless purity, in which they are arrayed? The Spirit of God hath answered us, *from the blood of the Lamb*; leading our thoughts

to that high dispensation of mercy, to which the saints above owe their establishment, first in grace, and then in glory. From that blood which was shed for the remission of sins, flow both the atonement of human guilt, and the regeneration of human nature. Human nature had fallen too low, to be capable of retrieving itself. It could not regain its primitive innocence, and still less was capable of raising itself so high in the scale of existence, as to mingle with angels. We had neither sufficient knowledge to discover, nor virtue to merit, nor ability to qualify ourselves for enjoying, celestial glory. Heaven must have been either covered from our view by perpetual darkness, or only beheld from afar as an inaccessible region, if Christ had not interposed, to open for us a new and living way within the veil. The obligations which his generous undertaking has conferred upon the human race, will tend highly to increase the felicity of the blessed. The sense of being distinguished by so illustrious a benefactor, and the corresponding returns of gratitude and love to him, form some of the most pleasing of those emotions, which shall continue to delight them through all eternity.

From those views of a state of future happiness, which the text has suggested, various instructions, relating to life and practice, naturally arise. We are taught to rectify our notions of felicity; to look for it, not in what is external, but in what relates to the mind and heart—in good dispositions and a purified soul—in unity and friendship with one another—and in the divine presence and favour. If such things form the principal articles of future bliss, they cannot but be essential to our happiness in the more early periods of existence: and he, who seeks his chief enjoyment from an opposite quarter, errs widely from the path which conducts to felicity.

We are farther taught whence to derive constancy

and perseverance, amidst the present discouragements of a virtuous life. In this world, we often behold good men depressed, and the wicked prospering around us. Our best deeds meet with unjust returns from an ungrateful world. Sincerity is over-reached by craft: and innocence falls a victim to power. But let us not on such occasions say within ourselves, *that in vain we have cleansed our hearts, and washed our hands in innocency.* Let us rest on the assurance, that these disorders extend not far in the kingdom of God. They affect only the first stage of existence. They relate to discipline and trial, which will soon be finished. In that permanent state, which is about to open, a new and better order of things shall arise. When dejected with the evils of life, let us look upward to that happy *multitude, who have come out of great tribulation, and now stand before the throne.* Until the day arrive, which shall join us to that blessed assembly, let us show ourselves worthy of the hope that is before us, by supporting, with a constant mind, the trials of our fidelity. *Be patient; stablish your hearts. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

From the prospects which the text has afforded, we may likewise learn what the spirit is, which should regulate our life. Sanctity of conduct, dignity of character, elevation of affections, become those who expect to mingle with angels, and *spirits of just men made perfect.* I mean not, that such prospects should carry away our whole attention from the present world, where, undoubtedly, lies the chief scene of human action, and human duty. But while we act as inhabitants of the earth, we ought, at the same time, so to remember our connexion with a better world, as not to debase ourselves with what is mean, not to defile ourselves with what is impure, not to entangle ourselves among what is ensnaring, in the present state. Let neither its advantages elate, nor its disappointments

deject us; but with an equal spirit, with a mind full of immortality, let us pass through all the changes of this mortal life.

Finally, let the discoveries of future happiness inspire us with suitable gratitude to God and Christ—to the Eternal Father who originally decreed such rewards for the righteous—and to the Son, who acts in the high character of the Dispenser of the divine mercies, and the great Restorer of the fallen race of men. Particularly, when approaching to God in solemn acts of devotion, such as we are at this day to perform, let gratitude be alive and ardent in our heart. The commemoration of our Saviour's death is in a high degree suited to awaken every emotion of tenderness and love. It brings before us, under one view, all the obligations which we lie under, to this great benefactor of mankind. When just ready to suffer for our sake, he instituted this holy sacrament, and said, *Do this in remembrance of me.*—Whom, O blessed Jesus! shall we ever remember, if we are capable of forgetting thee? thee, to whom we owe the forgiveness of sin, and the restoration of divine favour—our victory over death, and our hope of life eternal! Thou hast enlarged our views beyond these territories of disorders and darkness. Thou hast discovered to us the *city of the living God*. Thou settest open the gates of that *new Jerusalem*; and leadest us into the *path of life*. Thou from age to age gatherest *out of every nation, and kindred, and people, that multitude which stand before the throne*. Thou bringest them *out of great tribulation*. Thine are the *white robes* with which they are invested—thine, the *palms* which they bear,—and by thee they are placed under the light of the divine countenance for ever.

S E R M O N XXV.

ON CANDOUR.



I CORINTH. xiii. 5.

Charity—thinketh no evil.

RELIGION and government are the two great foundations of order and comfort among mankind. Government restrains the outrages and crimes which would be subversive of society, secures the property, and defends the lives of its subjects. But the defect of government is, that human laws can extend no farther than to the actions of men. Though they protect us from external violence, they leave us open on different sides to be wounded. By the vices which prevail in society, our tranquillity may be disturbed, and our lives in various ways embittered, while government can give us no redress. Religion supplies the insufficiency of law, by striking at the root of those disorders which occasion so much misery in the world. Its professed scope is to regulate, not actions alone, but the temper and inclinations. By this means it ascends to the sources of conduct; and very ineffectual would the wisest system of legislation prove for the happiness of mankind, if it did not derive aid from religion, in softening the dispositions of men, and checking many of those evil passions, to which the influence of law cannot possibly reach.

We are led to this reflexion by the description, given in the context, of charity, that great principle in the christian system. The apostle places it in a variety of lights; and under each of them explains its operation by its internal effects—not by the actions to which it gives rise, but by the dispo-

sitions which it produces in the heart. He justly supposes, that if the temper be duly regulated, propriety of action will follow, and good order take place in external behaviour. Of those characters of charity, I have chosen one for the subject of this discourse, which leads to the consideration of a virtue highly important to us, both as christians and as members of society. I shall endeavour, first, to explain the temper here pointed out, by showing what this description of charity imports, that *it thinketh no evil*; and then to recommend such a disposition, and to display the bad effects of an opposite turn of mind.

I. Let us consider what this description of charity imports. You will easily perceive, that the expression in the text is not to be understood in a sense altogether unlimited; as if there were no occasion, on which we are to think unfavourably of others. To view all the actions of men with the same degree of complacency, would be contrary both to common understanding, and to many express precepts of religion. In a world, where so much depravity abounds, were we to think and speak equally well of all, we must either be insensible of the distinction between right and wrong, or be indifferent to that distinction when we perceived it. Religion renders it our duty to *abhor that which is evil*; and, on many occasions, to express our indignation openly against it. But the apostle, with great propriety, describes the temper which he is recommending in such strong and general terms, as might guard us against that extreme, to which we are naturally most prone, of rash and unjust suspicion. The virtue, which he means to inculcate, is that which is known by the name of candour—a virtue, which, as soon as it is mentioned, every one will acknowledge to be essential to the character of a worthy man—a virtue which we seldom fail of ascribing to any person whom we seek to recommend to the es-

teem of others; but which, I am afraid, when we examine our own conduct, in a religious view, is seldom the subject of enquiry.

It is necessary to observe, that true candour is altogether different from that guarded, inoffensive language, and that studied openness of behaviour, which we so frequently meet with among men of the world. Smiling, very often; is the aspect, and smooth are the words, of those who inwardly are the most ready to think evil of others. That candour, which is a christian virtue, consists, not in fairness of speech, but in fairness of heart. It may want the blandishment of external courtesy, but supplies its place with humane and generous liberality of sentiment. Its manners are unaffected, and its professions cordial. Exempt, on one hand; from the dark jealousy of a suspicious mind—it is no less removed; on the other, from that easy credulity, which is imposed on by every specious pretence. It is perfectly consistent with extensive knowledge of the world, and with due attention to our own safety. In that various intercourse, which we are obliged to carry on, with persons of every different character, suspicion, to a certain degree, is a necessary guard: It is only when it exceeds the bounds of prudent caution, that it degenerates into vice. There is a proper mean between undistinguishing credulity, and universal jealousy, which a sound understanding discerns, and which the man of candour studies to preserve.

He makes allowance for the mixture of evil with good, which is to be found in every human character. He expects none to be faultless: and he is unwilling to believe that there is any without some commendable quality. In the midst of many defects, he can discover a virtue. Under the influence of personal resentment, he can be just to the merit of an enemy. He never lends an open ear to those defamatory reports and dark suggestions, which, among the tribes of the censorious, circulate with so much

rapidity, and meet with such ready acceptance. He is not hasty to judge: and he requires full evidence before he will condemn. As long as an action can be ascribed to different motives, he holds it as no mark of sagacity to impute it always to the worst. Where there is just ground for doubt, he keeps his judgment undecided: and, during the period of suspense, leans to the most charitable construction, which an action can bear. When he must condemn, he condemns with regret, and without those aggravations which the severity of others adds to the crime. He listens calmly to the apology of the offender, and readily admits every extenuating circumstance which equity can suggest. How much soever he may blame the principles of any sect or party, he never confounds, under one general censure, all who belong to that party or sect. He charges them not with such consequences of their tenets, as they refuse and disavow. From one wrong opinion, he does not infer the subversion of all sound principles; nor, from one bad action, conclude that all regard to conscience is overthrown. When he *beholds the mote in his brother's eye*, he remembers *the beam in his own*. He commiserates human frailty; and judges of others according to the principles by which he would think it reasonable that they should judge of him. In a word, he views men and actions in the clear sunshine of charity and good-nature—and not in that dark and fullen shade, which jealousy and party-spirit throw over all characters.—Such being in general the spirit of that charity which *thinketh no evil*, I proceed,

II. To recommend, by various arguments, this important branch of christian virtue:

Let us begin with observing what a necessary requisite it is to the proper discharge of all the social duties. I need not spend time in showing, that these hold a very high rank in the christian system.

The encomium, which the apostle in this chapter bestows upon charity, is alone sufficient to prove it.

He places this grace at the head of all the gifts and endowments which can be possessed by man; and assures us, that *though we had all faith, so that we could remove mountains, yet if we be destitute of charity, it will profit us nothing.* Accordingly, *love, gentleness, meekness, and long-suffering,* are enumerated as distinguishing fruits of the spirit of Christ*. But it is impossible for such virtues as these, to find place in a breast, where the propensity to think evil of others is predominant. Charitable and candid thoughts of men are the necessary introduction to all good-will and kindness. They form, if we may speak so, the only climate in which love can grow up and flourish. A suspicious temper checks in the bud every kind affection. It hardens the heart, and estranges man from man. What friendship or gratitude can you expect from him, who views all your conduct with distrustful eyes, and ascribes every benefit you confer, to artifice and stratagem? The utmost, which you can hope from one of this character, is justice in his dealings; nor even that can you be assured of; as the suspicions to which he is a prey, will afford him frequent pretexts for departing from truth, and for defending himself with the same arms which he conceives to be employed against him. Unhappy will they be, who are joined with him by any close connexion—exposed to every malignant suspicion which arises in his own mind, and to every unjust suggestion which the malice of others may insinuate against them. That store of poison, which is collected within him, frequently throws out its venom on all who are within its reach. As a companion, he will be severe and satirical—as a friend, captious and dangerous—in his domestic sphere, harsh, jealous, and irascible—in his civil capacity,

* Galat. v. 22, 23.

sedition and turbulent, prone to impute the conduct of his superiors to improper motives, and upon loose information to condemn their conduct.

The contrary of all this may be expected from a candid temper. Whatever is amiable in manners, or useful in society, naturally and easily ingrafts itself upon it. Gentleness, humanity, and compassion flow from it, as their native spring. Open and cheerful in itself, it diffuses cheerfulness and good-humour over all who are under its influence. It is the chief ground of mutual confidence and union among men. It prevents those animosities from arising, which are the offspring of groundless prejudice; or, by its benign interposition, allays them when arisen. In the magistrate, it tempers justice with lenity. Among subjects, it promotes good order and submission. It connects humanity with piety. For he, who is not given to think evil of his fellow-creatures, will not be ready to censure the dispensations of his Creator. Whereas the same turn of mind, which renders one jealous and unjust towards men, will incline him to be querulous and impious towards God.

In the second place, as a suspicious, uncharitable spirit is inconsistent with all social virtue and happiness; so, in itself, it is unreasonable and unjust. In order to form sound opinions concerning characters and actions, two things are especially requisite, information and impartiality. But such as are most forward to decide unfavourably, are commonly destitute of both. Instead of possessing, or even requiring, full information, the grounds on which they proceed, are frequently the most slight and frivolous. A tale, perhaps, which the idle have invented, the inquisitive have listened to, and the credulous have propagated—or a real incident, which rumour, in carrying it along, has exaggerated and disguised, supplies them with materials of confident

assertion, and decisive judgment. From an action, they presently look into the heart, and infer the motive. This supposed motive they conclude to be the ruling principle; and pronounce at once concerning the whole character.

Nothing can be more contrary both to equity and to sound reason, than such precipitate judgments. Any man, who attends to what passes within himself, may easily discern what a complicated system the human character is, and what a variety of circumstances must be taken into the account, in order to estimate it truly. No single instance of conduct whatever, is sufficient to determine it. As from one worthy action, it were credulity, not charity, to conclude a person to be free from all vice; so from one, which is censurable, it is perfectly unjust to infer that the author of it is without conscience, and without merit. Did you know all the attending circumstances, it might appear in an excusable light; nay, perhaps, under a commendable form. The motives of the actor may have been entirely different from those which you ascribe to him: and where you suppose him impelled by bad design, he may have been prompted by conscience and mistaken principle. Admitting the action to have been in every view criminal, he may have been hurried into it through inadvertency and surprise, he may have sincerely repented: and the virtuous principle may have now regained its full vigour. Perhaps this was the corner of frailty—the quarter on which he lay open to the incursions of temptation; while the other avenues of his heart were firmly guarded by conscience.

No error is more palpable, than to look for uniformity from human nature; though it is commonly on the supposition of it, that our general conclusions concerning character are formed. Mankind are consistent neither in good nor in evil. In the present state of frailty, all is mixed and blended.

The strongest contrarities of piety and hypocrisy, of generosity and avarice, of truth and duplicity, often meet in one character. The purest human virtue is consistent with some vice: and in the midst of much vice and disorder, amiable, nay respectable, qualities may be found. There are few cases, in which we have ground to conclude that all goodness is lost. At the bottom of the character, there may lie some sparks of piety and virtue suppressed, but not extinguished: which kept alive by the breath of heaven, and gathering strength in secret from reflexion, may, on the first favourable opening, which is afforded them, be ready to break forth with splendor and force.—Placed, then in a situation of so much uncertainty and darkness, where our knowledge of the hearts and characters of men is so limited, and our judgments concerning them are so apt to err, what a continual call do we receive either to suspend our judgment, or to give it on the favourable side?—especially when we consider, that, as through imperfect information we are unqualified for deciding soundly, so through want of impartiality, we are often tempted to decide wrong. How much this enforces the argument for candour, will appear by considering,

In the third place, what the sources are of those severe and uncharitable opinions which we are so ready to form. Were the mind altogether free from prepossession and bias, it might avail itself, to more advantage, of the scanty knowledge which it possesses. But this is so far from being the case, that on every side we are encumbered with prejudices, and warped by passions, which exert their influence in nothing more than in leading us to think evil of others. At all times we are justly said to *see through a glass, darkly*: but passion and prejudice, looking through a glass which distorts the form of the objects, make us also see falsely.

It is one of the misfortunes of our present situation, that some of the good dispositions of human nature are apt to betray us into frailties and vices. Thus it often happens, that the laudable attachment, which we contract to the country, or the church, to which we belong, or to some political denomination under which we class ourselves, both confines our affections within too narrow a sphere, and gives rise to violent prejudices against such as come under an opposite description. Not contented with being in the right ourselves, we must find all others in the wrong. We claim an exclusive possession of goodness and wisdom; and from approving warmly of those who join us, we proceed to condemn, with much acrimony, not only the principles, but the characters of those from whom we differ. Hence persons of well-disposed minds are too often, through the strength of partial good affection, involved in the crime of uncharitable judgment. They rashly extend to every individual the severe opinion which they have unwarrantably conceived of a whole body.—This man is of a party whose principles we reckon slavish: and therefore his whole sentiments are corrupted. That man belongs to a religious sect, which we are accustomed to deem bigoted: and therefore he is incapable of any generous or liberal thought. Another is connected with a sect, which we have been taught to account relaxed: and therefore he can have no sanctity.—Are these the judgments of candour and charity? Is true piety or virtue so very limited in its nature, as to be confined to such alone, as see every thing with our eyes, and follow exactly the train of our ideas? Was there ever any great community so corrupt, as not to include within it individuals of real worth?

Besides prepossessions of this nature, which sometimes mislead the honest mind, there are other, and much more culpable causes of uncharitable judg-

ment. Pride is hurt and wounded by every excellence in which it can claim no share; and from eagerness to discover a blemish, rests upon the slightest appearance of one, as a satisfying proof. When rivalry and competition concur with pride, our desire to espy defects increases, and, by consequence, the grounds of censure multiply. Where no opposition of interests takes place, envy has too much influence in warping the judgment of many. Even when none of these causes operate, the inward consciousness of depravity is sufficient to fill the mind with evil thoughts of others. Whence should a man so readily draw his opinion of men, as from that character with which he is best acquainted, because it is his own? A person of low and base mind naturally imputes to others the sentiments which he finds congenial to himself; and is incredulous of every excellency which to him is totally unknown. He enjoys, besides, consolation in the thought, that others are no better than himself; that his weaknesses and crimes are those of all men; and that such, as appear most distinguished for virtue, possess no real superiority, except greater dexterity in concealing their vices. Soothing themselves with this doctrine in secret, too many foster and strengthen the bad opinion which they entertain of all mankind. Rarely, if ever, have you ground to think well of that man's heart, who is on every occasion given to think the worst of others. Let us observe,

In the fourth place, that suitable to the sources whence a jealous and suspicious temper proceeds, are the effects which it produces in the world, the crimes and mischiefs with which it fills society. It possesses this unhappy distinction, beyond the other failings of the human heart, that while it impels men to violent deeds, it justifies to their own apprehension the excesses which they commit. Amidst

the uproar of other bad passions, conscience acts as a restraining power. As soon as the tumult subsides, remorse exerts its influence, and renders the sinner sensible of the evil which he has done. But the uncharitable man is unfortunately set loose from any such check or controul. Through the infatuation of prejudice, his judgment is perverted, conscience is misled; *the light within him is turned into darkness*. Viewing the objects of his displeasure as evil men, he thinks himself entitled to give that displeasure full vent; and in committing the most inhuman actions, may sometimes imagine that he is doing good service to God.

The first-fruits of an evil-thinking spirit are calumny and detraction, by which society is so often embroiled, and men are set at variance with one another. But, did it proceed no farther than censorious speech, the mischief would be less. Much greater and more serious evils frequently ensue. What direful effects, for instance, have often flowed from rash and ill-founded jealousy in private life? No sooner has one allowed that dæmon to take possession of his mind, than it perverts his understanding, and taints all his faculties. Haunting him by night and by day, bringing perpetually before him the odious and disquieting forms which it has raised up, it blackens every appearance to his view; gives to trifles, which are in themselves light as air, the weight of full confirmation; till what was at first a dubious surmise, or a slight displeasure, rises at length into full belief and implacable fury. Hence, families torn with the most violent convulsions; the husband armed against the wife, the father against the son, the friend against the friend; the plan of treachery and assassination contrived, and the dagger plunged into the bosom of the innocent.—In public life, how often have kingdoms been shaken with all the violence of war and rebellion, from the unjust suspicions which subjects had conceived of

their rulers ; or the rash jealousy which princes had entertained of their people ?—But it is in religious dissentions, chiefly, that the mischievous power of uncharitable prejudice has displayed its full atrocity. Religion is always found to heighten every passion on which it acts, and to render every contest, into which it enters, uncommonly ardent ; because the objects, which it presents, are of such a nature, as strongly to seize and engage the human mind. When zeal for their own principles has prompted men to view those of a different persuasion in the odious lights which bigotry suggests, every sentiment of humanity has too often been extinguished. The mild influence of that religion, which breathes nothing but gentleness, has proved too feeble to restrain the violent and bloody hand of persecution : and the uncharitable spirit, raging among contending parties, has filled the world with such calamities and crimes, as have brought disgrace on the christian name.

Let us attend particularly to one awful instance of the guilt which men may contract, and of the ruin which they may bring upon themselves, through the want of fairness and candour. The nation of the Jews were almost noted for a narrow and uncharitable spirit. When John the Baptist, and our blessed Lord, appeared among them, because the former was austere in his temper and retired in his life, they pronounced of him that he had an evil spirit : and because the latter was open and sociable in his manners, they held him to be destitute of that sanctity which became a prophet. Their prejudice against our Lord took its first rise from a most frivolous and contemptible cause. *Is not this the son of the carpenter ? Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ?* When his miracles repelled this reproach, and sufficiently proved the eminence of his character, still they fostered their prejudices by this most futile reasoning, *Have any of the rulers believed on him ?* Obstinate in their

attachment to a temporal Messiah, and continuing to view all our Saviour's conduct with an evil eye, when he conversed with bad men in order to reclaim them, they treated him as a *companion of publicans and sinners*. Because he disallowed their groundless traditions, they held him to be a breaker of the Sabbath, and a contemner of religion. Because he prophesied the destruction of their temple, they accused him of being an enemy to his own nation. Till at last, through their perpetual misconstruction of his actions, their passions became so inflamed as to make them cry out with one voice, *Away with this man to the death, and give us Barabbas the robber*. Viewing in this dreadful event the consequences of want of candour, let every man tremble to think evil rashly of his brother. No one can tell how far uncharitable prejudices may carry him in guilt, if he allow them to harbour and gather strength within his breast. The cloud, which *rose from the sea, no bigger than a man's hand*, may soon swell and spread, till it cover the whole horizon, and discharge with most destructive violence the gathered storm.

In the fifth place, as a suspicious spirit is the source of so many crimes and calamities in the world, so it is the spring of certain misery to the person who indulges it. His friends will be few; and small will be his comfort in those whom he possesses. Believing others to be his enemies, he will of course make them such. Let his caution be ever so great, the asperity of his thoughts will often break out in his behaviour; and, in return for suspecting and hating, he will incur suspicion and hatred. Besides the external evils which he draws upon himself, arising from alienated friendship, broken confidence, and open enmity; the suspicious temper itself is one of the worst evils which any man can suffer. *If in all fear there be torment*, how miserable must be his state, who, by living in perpe-

tual jealousy, lives in perpetual dread? Looking upon himself to be surrounded with spies, enemies, and designing men, he is a stranger to reliance and trust. He knows not to whom to open himself. He dresses his countenance in forced smiles, while his heart throbs within, from apprehensions of secret treachery. Hence fretfulness and ill-humour, disgust at the world, and all the painful sensations of an irritated and embittered mind.

So numerous and great are the evils arising from a suspicious disposition, that of the two extremes, it is more eligible to expose ourselves to occasional disadvantage from thinking too well of others, than to suffer continual misery by thinking always ill of them. It is better to be sometimes imposed upon, than never to trust. Safety is purchased at too dear a rate, when, in order to secure it, we are obliged to be always clad in armour, and to live in perpetual hostility with our fellows. This is, for the sake of living, to deprive ourselves of the comfort of life. The man of candour enjoys his situation, whatever it is, with cheerfulness and peace. Prudence directs his intercourse with the world: but no black suspicions haunt his hours of rest. Accustomed to view the characters of his neighbours in the most favourable light, he is like one who dwells amidst those beautiful scenes of nature, on which the eye rests with pleasure. Whereas the suspicious man, having his imagination filled with all the shocking forms of human falsehood, deceit, and treachery, resembles the traveller in the wilderness who discerns no objects around him but what are either dreary or terrible—caverns that open, serpents that hiss, and beasts of prey that howl. Hence in him are verified those descriptions, which the Spirit of God has given us of the misery of the wicked. *They shall have no peace. They shall be like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. The Lord shall give them a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind:*

and they shall fear day and night, and have none assurance of heart.—I add,

In the sixth and last place, that there is nothing which exposes men in a more marked and direct manner to the displeasure of the Almighty, than a malignant and censorious spirit. I insist not now on the general denunciations of divine wrath against malice and hatred. Let us only consider under what particular description the Spirit of God brings this crime of uncharitable judgment. It is declared to be an impious invasion of the prerogative of God, to whom alone it belongs to search all hearts, and to determine concerning all characters. This privilege he often appropriates expressly to himself, on purpose to restrain the rashness of censure among men; requiring us to leave the judging of others to him, and to attend to our own business and duty. *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master, he standeth or falleth. Judge nothing before the time; until the Lord come, who shall make manifest the counsels of the heart* *.

It deserves our most serious attention, that, in several passages of scripture, the great Judge of the world is represented, at the day of final retribution, as proceeding upon this principle, of rendering to men according to the manner in which they have acted towards their brethren. *With the merciful, thou wilt show thyself merciful: and with the froward, thou wilt show thyself froward. With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again* †. It is impossible to form an argument of more force than this, to restrain all severity of judgment among such as look forward to the tribunal of God. The argument extends not indeed so far, as to represent our acceptance with the Deity, as entirely suspended upon the candour which we show in forming our sen-

* Rom. xiv. 4. 1 Corinth. iv. 5. † Psalm xviii. 25, 26. Matth. vii. 2.

timents of others. We know that other graces besides this are requisite, in order to fit us for heaven; and that without piety towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, all our charity to men will be found defective and vain. But this we know also, that in the heart, which is destitute of fairness and candour, the Spirit of God certainly dwells not; and that whatever appearances of religion the uncharitable man may assume, on him the Sovereign of the universe looks with no favour. Thou, who art a man full of frailties, who standest in need, not merely of impartiality in thy divine Judge, but of indulgence and mercy—thou, who implorest daily this mercy from him, and prayest that he would *remember thou art dust*, and not be strict to *mark iniquity against thee*—darest thou with those very prayers in thy mouth, proceed to judge without candour of thy brethren, and, upon the slightest grounds, to reprobate and condemn them? O thou hypocrite! (for by what other name can we call thee?) vain are all thy pretensions to piety. Ineffectual is every plea which thou canst form for mercy from heaven. The precedent, which thou hast established against thyself, is decisive. Thou hast dictated the sentence of thine own condemnation.

On the whole, it clearly appears, that no part of the government of temper deserves attention more, than to keep our minds pure from uncharitable prejudices, and open to candour and humanity in judging of others. The worst consequences, both to ourselves and to society, follow from the opposite spirit. Let us beware of encouraging a habit of suspicion, by forming too severe and harsh opinions concerning human nature in general. A great proportion of infirmity and corruption, doubtless, adheres to it; yet tempered also it is with various mixtures of virtue and good affection. Darkened as the Divine image now is among mankind, it is not wholly effaced. Much piety and goodness may lie

hidden in hearts that are unknown to us. Vice is glaring and loud. The crimes of the wicked make a noise in the world, and alarm society. True worth is retired and modest, and requires particular situations to bring it forth to public notice. The prophet Elijah, in a time of prevailing corruption, imagined that all true religion had forsaken the land. *I, even I only*, said he to the Lord, *am left to serve thee*. But the Almighty, who discerned what was concealed from his imperfect view, replied, *Yet have I left me seven thousand men in Israel, who have not bowed the knee to Baal* *.

The aged, and the unfortunate, who have toiled through an unsuccessful life with long experience of the falsehood and fraud of evil men, are apt to be the most severe in the opinions which they entertain of others. For such, their circumstances may be allowed to form some degree of apology. But if, in youth and prosperity, the same hard suspicious spirit prevail—if they, who are beginning the career of life, set out with all the scruples of distrust—if, before they have had reason to complain of the world, they betray the diffidence of a jealous, and the malignity of a censorious mind—sad is the preface which may thence be drawn of their future dishonor. From such, you have nothing to look for, that shall be either engaging in private life, or respectable in public character. To youth it particularly belongs, to be generous in sentiment, candid in opinion, undefigning in behaviour, open to the most favourable construction of actions and conduct. Throughout all the stages of life, candour is one of the most honorable distinctions of the human character: it is connected with magnanimity; it is justified by wisdom; it is suitable to the relation in which we stand to one another. But if reason and humanity be insufficient to restrain us from rash and uncharitable judgments, let that awful denunciation

* 1 Kings, xix. 14. 18.

frequently resound in our ears, *He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath showed no mercy.*

S E R M O N XXVI.

On the CHARACTER of JOSEPH.

GENESIS, xlv. 5. 8.

Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life.—So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.

IN this generous manner, Joseph frames an apology for the unnatural behaviour of his brethren. He extenuates the atrocity of their crime, by representing the happy effects which it had produced. He looks beyond all second causes; and recognizes, in the wonderful events of his life, the hand of the Almighty. No human character, exhibited in the records of scripture, is more remarkable or instructive than that of this patriarch. He is one whom we behold tried in all the vicissitudes of fortune—from the condition of a slave, rising to be ruler of the land of Egypt—and in every station acquiring, by his virtue and wisdom, favour with God and man. When overseer of Potiphar's house, his fidelity was proved by strong temptations, which he honorably resisted. When thrown into prison by the artifice of a false woman, his integrity and prudence soon rendered him conspicuous, even in that dark mansion. When called into the presence of Pharaoh, the wise and extensive plan which he formed, for saving the kingdom from the miseries of impending

famine, justly raised him to a high station, wherein his abilities were eminently displayed in the public service. But in his whole history there is no circumstance so striking and interesting, as his behaviour to his brethren, who had sold him into slavery. The moment in which he made himself known to them, that moment at which we are now to contemplate him, was the most critical one of his life, and the most decisive of his character. It is such as rarely occurs in the course of human events; and is calculated to draw the highest attention of all who are endowed with any degree of sensibility of heart. Let us consider the sentiment which Joseph utters in the text under two views, each of which is very instructive to all christians. I. As a discovery of his cordial forgiveness of his brethren; and, II. As an instance of his dutiful attention to the Providence of God.

I. The most cordial forgiveness is here displayed. I shall not recapitulate all the preceding history respecting Joseph and his brethren; as it is well known by every one, who has the least acquaintance with the sacred writings. From the whole tenor of the narration it appears, that though Joseph, upon the arrival of his brethren in Egypt, made himself strange to them, yet from the beginning he intended to discover himself; and studied so to conduct the discovery as might render the surprise of joy complete. For this end, by affected severity, he took measures for bringing down into Egypt all his father's children. They were now arrived there—and Benjamin among the rest, who was his younger brother by the same mother, and was particularly beloved by Joseph. Him he threatened to detain; and seemed willing to allow the rest to depart. This incident renewed their distress. They all knew their father's extreme anxiety about the safety of Benjamin, and with what difficulty he had yielded to his undertaking this journey. Should he be pre-

vented from returning, they dreaded that grief would overpower the old man's spirits, and prove fatal to his life. Judah, therefore, who had particularly urged the necessity of Benjamin's accompanying his brothers, and had solemnly pledged himself to their father for his safe return, craved, upon this occasion, an audience of the governor; and gave him a full account of the circumstances of Jacob's family.

Nothing can be more interesting and pathetic than this discourse of Judah, as it is recorded in the preceding chapter. Little knowing to whom he spoke, he paints, in all the colours of simple and natural eloquence, the distressed situation of the aged patriarch, hastening to the close of life—long afflicted for the loss of a favourite son, whom he supposed to have been torn in pieces by a beast of prey—labouring now under anxious concern about his youngest son, the child of his old age, who alone was left alive of his mother, and whom nothing but the calamities of severe famine could have moved a tender father to send from home, and expose to the dangers of a foreign land. *If we bring him not back with us, we shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant, our father, with sorrow, to the grave. I pray thee, therefore, let thy servant abide instead of the young man, a bondman to our lord. For how shall I go up to my father, and Benjamin not with me? lest I see the evil that shall come on my father.*

Upon this relation, Joseph could no longer restrain himself. The tender ideas of his father and his father's house, of his ancient home, his country and his kindred, of the distress of his family, and his own exaltation, all rushed too strongly upon his mind to bear any further concealment. *He cried, cause every man to go out from me; and he wept aloud.* The tears which he shed, were not the tears of grief. They were the burst of affection. They were the effusions of a heart overflowing with all the tender sensibilities of nature. Formerly he had been mov-

ed in the same manner, when he first saw his brethren before him. *His bowels yearned upon them ; he sought for a place where to weep. He went into his chamber ; and then washed his face, and returned to them. At that period, his generous plans were not completed. But now, when there was no farther occasion for constraining himself, he gave free vent to the strong emotions of his heart. The first minister to the king of Egypt was not ashamed to show, that he felt as a man, and a brother. He wept aloud : and the Egyptians, and the house of Pharoah, heard him.*

The first words, which his swelling heart allowed him to pronounce, are the most suitable to such an affecting situation which were ever uttered ;—*I am Joseph ; doth my father yet live ?*—What could he, what ought he, in that impassioned moment, to have said more ? This is the voice of nature herself, speaking her own language ; and it penetrates the heart : no pomp of expression—no parade of kindness—but strong affection, hastening to utter what it strongly felt. *His brethren could not answer him ; for they were troubled at his presence.* Their silence is as expressive of those emotions of repentance and shame, which, on this amazing discovery, filled their breasts, and stopped their utterance, as the few words which Joseph speaks, are expressive of the generous agitations which struggled for vent within him. No painter could seize a more striking moment for displaying the characteristical features of the human heart, than what is here presented. Never was there a situation of more tender and virtuous joy, on the one hand—nor, on the other, of more overwhelming confusion and conscious guilt. In the simple narration of the sacred historian, it is set before us with greater energy and higher effect, than if it had been wrought up with all the colouring of the most admired modern eloquence.

When Joseph had a little recovered himself from the first transports of emotion, he proceeds to ex-

plain his situation to his brethern, and to show them the beneficent purposes for which he conceived himself to be raised by Providence into power. The apology, which he makes in the text, for their former cruelty, is uncommon and remarkable. *Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you, to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives, by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God; and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.* This apology was, in truth, no satisfactory excuse for their crime. For though the overruling Providence of Heaven had so directed the course of events, as to render their bad intentions subservient to a happy issue; yet the badness of the intention originated entirely from themselves. The envy and jealousy, which they entertained against their brother, led them to the commission of an atrocious deed. The deed was voluntary: the crime was all their own: and the interposition of Providence, in making unforeseen consequences follow from that crime, did not, could not exculpate them from guilt. It were an impious conclusion, that because God extracts good from our evil, we are not answerable for the evil which we perpetrate. *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man**. But the sentiment in the text is to be considered, as a colour which the generous humanity of Joseph prompted him to throw on the conduct of his brethren. He saw the confusion with which they were overwhelmed in his presence. He diverts their attention from the remembrance of a crime, which was now wringing their hearts with anguish, by representing to them the happy effects which that crime had produced. He sets them free from all uneasiness on his account. He calls upon them to rejoice in his prosperity; and, instead of dwelling on a painful recollection of their own conduct, to join

* James, i. 13.

with him in acknowledging and adoring the hand of the Almighty.

How different is this amiable spirit which Joseph discovers, from that harsh and ostentatious superiority which too often accompanies the pretended forgiveness of injuries, among those who call themselves christians! They are ready to say, that, for their part, they pardon the wrongs which have been done them: they wish that the persons who have committed them, may be able to forgive themselves: they leave them to God and to their own conscience. By the severe suggestions which they throw out, they discover the inward bitterness of their spirit; and artfully gratify resentment, at the time when they profess to exercise forgiveness. Whereas the great and good man, whose character we now consider, effaces all memory of the crimes which he pardons. He seeks to alleviate the remorse of his brethren, by an extenuation of their guilt; and, while he is preparing to make their circumstances comfortable, studies at the same time to render their minds easy and tranquil.

This was not merely a transient emotion with Joseph, owing to the first burst of affection, on discovering himself to his brethren. We have a clear proof, from a remarkable transaction which passed many years after this period, of his disposition continuing the same to the end of life. It is recorded in the last chapter of this book, that when Jacob died, his sons began to be seized with fear concerning the treatment which they might receive from their brother. The guilty are always suspicious. Conscious of their own baseness, they are incapable of conceiving the magnanimity of others. They saw the bond, which held the family together, now broken by their father's death. They dreaded that the resentment of Joseph against them had hitherto been only suppressed, or concealed. *They said among themselves, peradventure he will now hate us, and requite all the evil which we did unto him.*

Under this apprehension, they first sent a humble message, to deprecate his displeasure by the memory of their common father; and then appearing in his presence, they fell down before his face, professing themselves to be his servants, and praying him to forgive the trespass which they had committed against him. But no such hidden resentment as they dreaded, had ever lurked in the soul of Joseph. On the contrary, when he beheld his brethren in this affecting situation, bereaved of their ancient protector, and reduced, as they imagined, to the necessity of holding up their hands to him for mercy, he was over-powered by a tide of tender emotions. *Joseph wept, while his brethren spake unto him.* These affectionate tears alone were sufficient to have assured them of his forgiveness. But hastening also by words to dispel their alarms, he presently added, *Fear not; for though ye thought evil against me, God meant it unto good. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them* *.

Such was the last incident that is recorded in the life of this eminent personage, than whom you will find few more distinguished by an assemblage of illustrious virtues; in the lowest adversity, patient and faithful—in the highest prosperity, beneficent and generous—dutiful and affectionate as a son—kind and forgiving, as a brother—accomplished, as a statesman—wise and provident, as a ruler of the land. In such a character, you behold human nature possessing its highest honors. The sentiments which it inspires, tend to ennoble our minds; and to prevent their imbibing the spirit of those hard, interested, and self-seeking men, with whom the world abounds.

The striking example of forgiveness, which the text displays, ought frequently occur to our thoughts, amidst the various occasions of provocation and of-

* Genes. l. 21.

fence which arise in our intercourse with the world. If one so worthy and amiable, in the days too of his youth and innocence, suffered such cruel treatment from his brothers, ought we to be surpris'd, if, even from our nearest relations, we meet with injustice or ingratitude? Wrongs and injuries are, more or less, the portion of all. Like death, they are an evil unavoidable. No station is so high, no power so great, no character so unblemished, as to exempt us from them. In the world, ungrateful men, false friends, and violent enemies abound. Every wise man ought to prepare himself for what he is to encounter, in passing through this thorny region. He is not to expect that he can *gather grapes from thistles*; nor to lose the government of his mind, because, in the midst of evil men, he is not allowed to remain, like a secret and inviolable person, untouched and uninjured.

As this view of our situation ought to blunt the edge of passion and impatience; so the alleviating circumstances, which reason will suggest, ought to mollify resentment. Think of the various constructions which the actions of men will bear. Consider how different the motives, of him who hath given us offence, may have been from those, which, in the heat of passion, we ascribe to him—how apt all men are to be seduced by mistaken views of interest—and how little ground we have to complain, if, upon a supposed interfering of interests, we suffer by others preferring their own to ours. Remember, that no opinions, which you form under the power of resentment, can be depended upon as just; and that every one loads the intentions of his enemy with imaginary degrees of malice.

But admitting the injury you have received to be ever so atrocious in its nature, and aggravated in its circumstances—supposing it to be even parallel to that which Joseph suffered—look up, like him to that divine government under which we are all placed. If forgive-

ness be a duty which we know God to have required under the most awful sanctions, dare we draw upon ourselves the merited vengeance of that Superior, to whose clemency we are obliged daily to fly? When, with hard and unrelenting dispositions towards our brethren, we send up to heaven prayers for mercy to ourselves, those prayers return like imprecations upon our heads; and our very devotions seal our condemnation.

The most plain and natural sentiments of equity concur with divine authority, to enforce the duty which I now recommend. Let him, who has never in his life done wrong, be allowed the privilege of remaining inexorable. But let such as are conscious of frailties and crimes, consider forgiveness as a debt which they owe to others. Common failings are the strongest lesson of mutual forbearance. Were this virtue unknown among men, order and comfort, peace and repose, would be strangers to human life. Injuries, retaliated according to the exorbitant measure which passion prescribes, would justify resentment in return. The injured person would become the injurer: and thus wrongs, retaliations, and fresh injuries, would circulate in endless succession, till the world was rendered a field of blood. Of all the passions which invade the human breast, revenge is the most direful. When allowed to reign with full dominion, it is more than sufficient to poison the few pleasures which remain to man in his present state. How much soever a person may suffer from injustice, he is always in hazard of suffering more from the prosecution of revenge. The violence of an enemy cannot inflict what is equal to the torment he creates to himself, by means of the fierce and desperate passions which he allows to rage in his soul.

Those evil spirits, who inhabit the regions of misery, are represented as delighting in revenge and cruelty. But all that is great and good in the universe, is on the side of clemency and mercy. The

Almighty Ruler of the world, though for ages offended by the unrighteousness, and insulted by the impiety of men, is *long-suffering and slow to anger*. His Son, when he appeared in our nature, exhibited, both in his life and his death, the most illustrious example of forgiveness which the world ever beheld. If you look into the history of mankind, you will find that, in every age, those who have been respected as worthy, or admired as great, have been distinguished for this virtue. Revenge dwells in little minds. A noble and magnanimous spirit is always superior to it. It suffers not from the injuries of men those severe shocks which others feel. Collected within itself, it stands unmoved by their impotent assaults; and with generous pity, rather than with anger, looks down on their unworthy conduct. It has been truly said, that the greatest man on earth can no sooner commit an injury, than a good man can make himself greater, by forgiving it. Joseph, at the moment when we now contemplate him, had entirely under his power all those unnatural brethren who had been guilty towards him of the most cruel outrage which men could perpetrate. He could have retained them for ever in that Egyptian bondage to which they had once consigned him; and have gratified revenge, by every accumulation of disgrace which despotic power enabled him to inflict. Had he acted this part, he might for a while have been soothed by the pleasures of his high station: but remorse, in the end, would have stung his soul. Cruelty would have rendered him unhappy within himself, as well as odious to others: and his name would have perished among the crowd of those contemptible statesmen, whose actions stain the annals of history. Whereas now, his character stands among the foremost in the ranks of spotless fame. His memory is blessed to all generations. His example continues to edify the world: and he himself shines in the celestial regions, *as the brightness of the*

firmament, and as the stars, for ever and ever. Let us now,

II. Consider the sentiment contained in the text, not only as a discovery of cordial forgiveness, but as an expression of devout attention to the conduct of Providence. *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.* Remark how beautifully piety and humanity are, in this instance, connected together. As we are told of Cornelius, the good centurion, that *his prayers and his alms, his devotion and his good works, came up together in memorial before God;* so here we perceive fraternal affection and religious reverence, mingling in one emotion within the patriarch's heart. In a person of low and vulgar mind, the sensations, on such an occasion, would have been extremely different. Looking back on the past events of his life, he would have ascribed all the adversity, which he had suffered, to the perverse treatment of his brothers—and all the prosperity which he afterwards attained, to his own good conduct and wisdom; and by consequence would have remained embittered against the instruments of the one, and filled with pride and self-sufficiency on account of the other. But the elevated and noble mind of Joseph rejected such unworthy sentiments. Contemplating the hand of God in all that had befallen him, he effaced the remembrance of those evil deeds which had produced his adversity: and for his prosperity he affected no praise to himself, but ascribed it entirely to the will of heaven. Let us take notice, that this is not the reflexion of a private, retired man, whose situation might be supposed to favour such devout meditations. It is the reflexion of one, who was leading a busy and a seducing life, in the midst of a court—the favourite of the greatest monarch who was then known in the world. Yet him you behold, amidst the submission and adulation which was paid to him, preserving the moderation and simplicity of a virtuous mind; and,

amidst the idolatry and false philosophy of the Egyptians, maintaining the principles of true religion, and giving glory to the God of Israel.

From this union of piety with humanity, which is so conspicuous in the sentiments of Joseph, there arises one very important instruction; That a devout regard to the hand of God, in the various events of life, tends to promote good dispositions and affections towards men. It will be found, by those who attend to the workings of human nature, that a great proportion of those malignant passions, which break out in the intercourse of men, arises from confining their attention wholly to second causes, and overlooking the first cause of all. Hence, they are insolent in prosperity, because they discern nothing higher than their own abilities: and in adversity they are peevish and unforgiving, because they have no object on which to fix their view, but the conduct of men who have acted as their enemies. They behold no plan of wisdom or goodness carried on throughout nature, which can allay the discomposure of their mind. As soon as their temper is ruffled, the world appears to them to be a continued scene of disasters and injuries, of confused events and of unreasonable men. Whereas, to the pious man, the contemplation of the universe exhibits a very different spectacle. In the midst of seeming confusion, he traces a principle of order: and by attention to that order, his mind is harmonized and calmed. He beholds a wise and righteous Governor presiding over all the commotions which are raised by the tumult of conflicting passions and interests—guiding, with imperceptible influence, the hand of the violent to beneficent purposes—accomplishing unexpected ends by the most improbable means—obliging the *wrath of man to praise him*—sometimes humbling the mighty, sometimes exalting the low—often *snaring the wicked in the devices which their hands have wrought.* Respectful acknow-

ledgment of this divine government, controuls the disorders of inferior passions. Reverence for the decrees of heaven inspires patience and moderation. Trust in that perfect wisdom and goodness, which directs all for the best, diminishes the shock which worldly disasters occasion. The irritation of passion and resentment will always bear proportion to the agitation which we suffer from the changes of fortune. One, who connects himself with nothing but second causes, partakes of the violence and irregularity of all the inferior movements belonging to this great machine. He, who refers all to God, dwells, if we may speak so, in that higher sphere where motion begins: he is subject to fewer shocks and concussions, and is only carried along by the motion of the universe.

How can mildness or forgiveness gain place in the temper of that man, who, on occasion of every calamity which he suffers from the ill-usage of others, has no sanctuary within his own breast, to which he can make retreat from their vexations—who is possessed of no principle, which is of sufficient power to bear down the rising tide of peevish and angry passions? The violence of an enemy, or the ingratitude of a friend, the injustice of one man, and the treachery of another, perpetually dwell and rankle in his thoughts. The part, which they have acted in bringing on his distress, is frequently more grating to him than the distress itself. Whereas he, who in every event looks up to God, has always in his view a great and elevating object, which inspires him with magnanimity. His mind lies open to every relieving thought, and is inclined to every suggestion of generosity. He is disposed to say with Joseph, *it was not you that sent me hither, but God*; with David, *it is the Lord*; *let him do what seemeth good in his eyes*; and with a greater Personage than either of these, *the cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it*? Hence arises superiority

to many of the ordinary provocations of the world. For he looks upon the whole of his present life as part of a great plan which is carried on under the direction of heaven. In this plan, he views men as acting their several parts, and contributing to his good or evil. But their parts he considers as subordinate ones; which, though they may justly merit his affection, and may occasionally call forth his resentment, yet afford no proper foundation to violent or malignant passion. He looks upon bad men as only the rod with which the Almighty chastens—like the pestilence, the earthquake, or the storm. In the midst of their injustice and violence he can pity their blindness; and imitate our blessed Lord in praying, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

S E R M O N XXVII.

On the CHARACTER of HAZAEL.

2 KINGS, viii. 12, 13.

And Hazael said, Why weepeth my Lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel. Their strong holds wilt thou set on fire: and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword; and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.

IN the days of Joram, king of Israel, flourished the prophet Elisha. His character was so eminent, and his fame so widely spread, that Benhadad

the king of Syria, though an idolater, sent to consult him, concerning the issue of a distemper which threatened his life. The messenger, employed on this occasion, was Hazael, who appears to have been one of the princes or chief men of the Syrian court. Charged with rich gifts from the king, he presents himself before the prophet; and accosts him in terms of the highest respect. During the conference which they held together, Elisha fixed his eye stedfastly on the countenance of Hazael; and discerning, by a prophetic spirit, his future tyranny and cruelty, he could not contain himself from bursting into a flood of tears. When Hazael, in surprise, inquired into the cause of this sudden emotion, the prophet plainly informs him of the crimes and barbarities which he foresaw that hereafter he should commit. The soul of Hazael abhorred, at this time, the thoughts of cruelty. Uncorrupted, as yet, by ambition or greatness, his indignation arose at being thought capable of such savage actions as the prophet had mentioned; and, with much warmth, he replies, *But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* Elisha makes no return, but to point out a remarkable change which was to take place in his condition: *The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.* In course of time, all that been predicted, came to pass. Hazael ascended the throne: and ambition took possession of his heart. *He smote the children of Israel in all their coasts. He oppressed them during all the days of king Jehoahaz**; and, from what is left on record of his actions, plainly appears to have proved, what the prophet foresaw him to be, a man of violence, cruelty, and blood.

In this passage of history, an object is presented, which deserves our serious attention. We behold a man, who, in one state of life, could not look upon certain crimes without surprise and horror;

* 2 Kings, xiii. 22.

who knew so little of himself, as to believe it impossible for him ever to be concerned in committing them; that same man, by a change of condition, transformed in all his sentiments, and as he rose in greatness rising also in guilt; till at last he completed that whole character of iniquity which he once detested. Hence the following observations naturally arise. I. That to a mind not entirely corrupted, sentiments of abhorrence at guilt are natural. II. That notwithstanding those sentiments, the mind may be brought under the dominion of the vices which it had most abhorred. III. That this unhappy revolution is frequently owing to a change of men's external circumstances and condition in the world. These observations are to make the subject of the present discourse; and will lead us to such a view of human nature, as it is hoped, may be of general use.

I. Sentiments of abhorrence at guilt are natural to the human mind. Hazael's reply to the prophet shows how strongly he felt them. *Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* Is he, or can he ever be, so base and wretched as to perpetrate crimes, which would render him unworthy of bearing the name of a man? This is the voice of human nature, while it is not as yet hardened in iniquity. Some vices are indeed more odious to the mind than others. Providence has wisely pointed the sharpest edge of this natural aversion against the crimes which are of most pernicious and destructive nature; such as treachery, oppression, and cruelty. But in general, the distinction between moral good and evil is so strongly marked, as to stamp almost every vice with the character of turpitude. Present to any man, even the most ignorant and untutored, an obvious instance of injustice, falsehood, or impiety; let him view it in a cool moment, when no passion blinds, and no interest warps him; and you will find that his mind immediately revolts against it, as

shameful and base, nay, as deserving punishment. Hence, in reasoning on the characters of others, however men may mistake as to facts, yet they generally praise and blame according to the principles of sound morality.

With respect to their own character, a notorious partiality too generally misleads their judgment. But it is remarkable, that no sinner ever avows directly to himself, that he has been guilty of gross and downright iniquity. Even when engaged by his passions in the commission of the greatest crimes, he always palliates them to his own mind, by some extenuation or apology, some pretended necessity, or some borrowed colour of innocence. Such power the undeniable dignity of virtue, and the acknowledged turpitude of vice, possess over every human heart. These sentiments are the remaining impressions of that law, which was originally written on the mind of man. They are gleams of that light, which once shone clear and strong within us; and which, though it be now greatly obscured, yet continues to shoot a feeble ray athwart the darkness of human nature. But whatever sentiments of abhorrence at vice we may at any time entertain, we have no reason to build upon these a presumptuous confidence of our continuance in virtue. For the next instruction, which the text suggests, is,

II. That such is man's ignorance of his own character, such the frailty of his nature, that he may one day become infamous for those very crimes which at present he holds in detestation. This observation is too well verified by the history of Hazael: and a thousand other instances might be brought to confirm it. Though there is nothing which every person ought to know so thoroughly, as his own heart, yet from the conduct of men it appears, that there is nothing with which they are less acquainted. Always more prone to flatter themselves, than desirous to discover the truth, they trust to their being

possessed of every virtue, which has not been put to the trial; and reckon themselves secure against every vice, to which they have not hitherto been tempted. As long as their duty hangs in speculation, it appears so plain, and so eligible, that they cannot doubt of performing it. The suspicion never enters their mind, that in the hour of speculation, and in the hour of practice, their sentiments may differ widely. Their present disposition, they easily persuade themselves, will ever continue the same: and yet that disposition is changing with circumstances every moment.

The man, who glows with the warm feelings of devotion, imagines it impossible for him to lose that sense of the divine goodness which at present melts his heart. He, whom his friend has lately saved from ruin, is confident, that, if some trying emergency shall put his gratitude to proof, he will rather die than abandon his benefactor. He, who lives happy and contented in frugal industry, wonders how any man can give himself up to dissolute pleasure. Were any of those persons informed, by a superior spirit, that the time was shortly to come, when the one should prove an example of scandalous impiety, the other of treachery to his friend, and the third of all that extravagant luxury which disgraces a growing fortune; each of them would testify as much surprize and abhorrence as Hazael did, upon hearing the predictions of the prophet. Sincere they might very possibly be in their expressions of indignation; for hypocrisy is not always to be charged on men whose conduct is inconsistent. Hazael was in earnest, when he resented with such ardour the imputation of cruelty. The apostle Peter was sincere, when he made the zealous profession, that though he should go to prison and to death with his master, he would never deny him. They were sincere; that is, they spoke from the fulness of their hearts, and from the warmth of the present moment:

but they did not know themselves, as the events which followed plainly showed. So false to its principles, too frequently, is the heart of man—so weak is the foundation of human virtue—so much reason there is for what the gospel perpetually inculcates, concerning the necessity of distrusting ourselves, and depending on divine aid. Mortifying, I confess, is this view of human nature; yet proper to be attended to by all, in order to escape the most fatal dangers. For, merely through unguarded conduct, and from the want of this prudent suspicion of their own weakness, how many, after the most promising beginnings, have gradually apostatized from every principle of virtue; until, at last, it has become as difficult for one to believe, that they ever had any love of goodness, as it would have been once to have persuaded themselves, that they were to advance to such a height in wickedness?

In such cases as I have described, what has become, it may be enquired, of those sentiments of abhorrence at guilt, which were once felt so strongly? Are they totally erased? or, if in any degree they remain, how do such persons contrive to satisfy themselves, in acting a part which their minds condemn?—Here, there is a mystery of iniquity which requires to be unfolded. Latent and secret is the progress of corruption within the soul; and the more latent, the more dangerous is its growth. No man becomes of a sudden completely wicked. Guilt never shows its whole deformity at once; but by gradual acquaintance reconciles us to its appearance, and imperceptibly diffuses its poison through all the powers of the mind. Every man has some darling passion, which generally affords the first introduction to vice. The irregular gratifications, into which it occasionally seduces him, appear under the form of venial weaknesses; and are indulged in the beginning, with scrupulousness and reserve. But, by longer practice, these restraints weaken, and the

power of habit grows. One vice brings in another to its aid. By a sort of natural affinity, they connect and entwine themselves together; till their roots come to be spread wide and deep over all the soul. When guilt rises to be glaring, conscience endeavours to remonstrate. But conscience is a calm principle. Passion is loud and impetuous; and creates a tumult, which drowns the voice of reason. It joins, besides, artifice to violence; and seduces at the same time that it impels. For it employs the understanding to impose upon the conscience. It devises reasons and arguments, to justify the corruptions of the heart. The common practice of the world is appealed to. Nice distinctions are made. Men are found to be circumstanced in so peculiar a manner, as to render certain actions excusable, if not blameless, which in another situation, it is confessed, would have been criminal. By such a process as this, there is reason to believe, that a great part of mankind advance from step to step in sin, partly hurried by passion, and partly blinded by self-deceit, without any just sense of the degree of guilt which they contract. By inveterate habits, their judgment is, at length, perverted, and their moral feelings are deadened. They see now with other eyes; and can look without pain on evil actions, which they formerly abhorred.

It is proper, however, to observe, that though our native sentiments of abhorrence at guilt may be so borne down, or so eluded, as to lose their influence on conduct; yet those sentiments, belonging originally to our frame, and being never totally eradicated from the soul, will still retain so much authority, as, if not to reform, at least, on some occasions, to chasten the sinner. It is only during a course of prosperity, that vice is able to carry on its delusions without disturbance. But, amidst the dark and thoughtful situations of life, conscience regains its rights; and pours the whole bitterness

of remorse on his heart, who has apostatized from his original principles. We may well believe, that, before the end of his days, Hazael's first impressions would be made to return. In the hour of adversity, the remembrance of his conference with the venerable prophet would sting his heart. Comparing the sentiments, which, in those his better days, he felt, with the atrocious cruelties which he had afterwards committed, all the honors of royalty would be unable to save him from the inward sense of baseness and infamy.

From this view, which has been exhibited, of the progress of corruption, and of the danger to which we are exposed, of falling from principles, which once appeared firmly established, let us receive useful admonition for our own conduct. *Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast like him that putteth it off.* Let no man place a rash and dangerous confidence in his virtue. But *let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* Never adventure on too near an approach to what is evil. Familiarize not yourselves with it, in the slightest instances, without fear. Listen with reverence to every reprehension of conscience; and preserve the most quick and accurate sensibility to right and wrong. If ever your moral impressions begin to decay, and your natural abhorrence of guilt to lessen, you have ground to dread, that the ruin of virtue is fast approaching. While you employ all the circumspection and vigilance, which reason can suggest, let your prayers, at the same time, continually ascend to God for support and aid. Remember, that from him *descendeth every good and perfect gift*; and that to him only it belongs, to *keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.* I proceed now to the

III^d. Observation from the text, that the power, which corruption acquires, to pervert the original principles of man, is frequently owing to a change

of their circumstances and condition in the world. How different was Hazael, the messenger of Benhadad, from Hazael the king; he, who started at the mention of cruelty, from him who waded in blood! Of this sad and surprising revolution, the prophet emphatically assigns the cause, in these few words: *The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.* That crown, that fatal crown, which is to be set upon thy head, shall shed a malignant influence over thy nature; and shall produce that change in thy character, which now thou canst not believe.—Whose experience of the world is so narrow, as not to furnish him with instances similar to this, in much humbler conditions of life? So great is the influence of a new situation of external fortune—such a different turn it gives to our temper and affections, to our views and desires—that no man can fortel what his character would prove, should Providence either raise or depress his circumstances in a remarkable degree, or throw him into some sphere of action, widely different from that to which he has been accustomed in former life.

The seeds of various qualities, good and bad, lie in all our hearts. But until proper occasions ripen and bring them forward, they lie there inactive and dead. They are covered up and concealed within the recesses of our nature: or, if they spring up at all, it is under such an appearance, as is frequently mistaken, even by ourselves. Pride, for instance, in certain situations, has no opportunity of displaying itself, but as magnanimity, or sense of honor. Avarice appears as necessary and laudable economy. What in one station of life would discover itself to be cowardice and baseness of mind, passes in another for prudent circumspection. What in the fulness of power would prove to be cruelty and oppression, is reputed, in a subordinate rank, no more than the exercise of proper discipline. For a while, the man is known neither by the world nor by himself,

to be what he truly is. But bring him into a new situation of life, which accords with his predominant disposition; which strikes on certain latent qualities of his soul, and awakens them into action; and as the leaves of a flower gradually unfold to the sun, so shall all his true character open full to view.

This may, in one light, be accounted not so much an alteration of character, produced by a change of circumstances, as a discovery brought forth of the real character, which formerly lay concealed. Yet, at the same time, it is true that the man himself undergoes a change. For opportunity being given for certain dispositions, which had lain dormant, to exert themselves without restraint, they of course gather strength. By means of the ascendancy which they gain, other parts of the temper are borne down; and thus an alteration is made in the whole structure and system of the soul. He is a truly wise and good man, who, through divine assistance, remains superior to this influence of fortune on his character; who, having once imbibed worthy sentiments, and established proper principles of action, continues constant to these, whatever his circumstances be; maintains, throughout all the changes of his life, one uniform and supported tenor of conduct; and what he abhorred as evil and wicked in the beginning of his days, continues to abhor to the end. But how rare is it to meet with this honorable consistency among men, while they are passing through the different stations and periods of life! When they are setting out in the world, before their minds have been greatly misled or debased, they glow with generous emotions, and look with contempt on what is sordid and guilty. But advancing farther in life, and inured by degrees to the crooked ways of men—pressing through the crowd, and the bustle of the world—obliged to contend with this man's craft, and that man's scorn—

accustomed, sometimes, to conceal their sentiments, and often to stifle their feelings—they became, at last, hardened in heart, and familiar with corruption. Who would not drop a tear over this sad, but frequent fall of human probity and honor? Who is not humbled, when he beholds the refined sentiments and high principles, on which we are so ready to value ourselves, brought to such a shameful issue—and man, with all his boasted attainments of reason, discovered so often to be the creature of his external fortune, moulded and formed by the incidents of his life?

The instance of Hazael's degeneracy leads us to reflect, in particular, on the dangers which arise from stations of power and greatness—especially when the elevation of men to these has been rapid and sudden. Few have the strength of mind, which is requisite for bearing such a change with temperance and self-command. The respect which is paid to the great, and the scope which their condition affords, for the indulgence of pleasure, are perilous circumstances to virtue. When men live among their equals, and are accustomed to encounter the hardships of life, they are of course reminded of their mutual dependence on each other, and of the dependence of all upon God. But when they are highly exalted above their fellows, they meet with few objects to awaken serious reflexion, but with many to feed and inflame their passions. They are apt to separate their interest from that of all around them; to wrap themselves up in their vain grandeur; and, in the lap of indolence and selfish pleasure, to acquire a cold indifference to the concerns even of those whom they call their friends. The fancied independence, into which they are lifted up, is adverse to sentiments of piety, as well as of humanity, in their heart. *Taking the timbrel and the harp, and rejoicing at the sound of the organ, they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy*

ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? or what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?

But we are not to imagine, that elevated stations in the world furnish the only formidable trials to which our virtue is exposed. It will be found, that we are liable to no fewer nor less dangerous temptations, from the opposite extreme of poverty and depression. When men, who have known better days, are thrown down into abject situations of fortune, their spirits are broken and their temper soured. Envy rankles in their breast, at such as are more successful. The providence of heaven is accused in secret murmurs: and the sense of misery is ready to push them to atrocious crimes, in order to better their state. Among the inferior classes of mankind, craft and dishonesty are too often found to prevail. Low and penurious circumstances depress the human powers. They deprive men of the proper means of knowledge and improvement; and where ignorance is gross, it is always in hazard of engendering profligacy.

Hence it has been generally, the opinion of wise men in all ages, that there is a certain middle condition of life, equally remote from either of those extremes of fortune, which, though it want not also its own dangers, yet is, on the whole, the state most favourable both to virtue and to happiness. For there, luxury and pride on the one hand, have not opportunity to enervate or intoxicate the mind; nor want and dependence on the other, to sink and debase it: there, all the native affections of the soul have the freest and fairest exercise, the equality of men is felt, friendships are formed, and improvements of every sort are pursued with most success: there men are prompted to industry without being overcome by toil; and their powers called forth into exertion, without being either superseded by too much abundance, or baffled by insuperable difficulties: there, a mixture of comforts and of wants,

at once awakens their gratitude to God, and reminds them of their dependence on his aid: and therefore, in this state, men seem to enjoy life to most advantage, and to be least exposed to the snares of vice. Such a condition is recorded in the book of Proverbs, to have been the wish and choice of one who was eminent for wisdom. *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain**.

From the whole view which we have now taken of the subject, we may in the first place, learn the reasons for which a variety of conditions and ranks was established by Providence among mankind. This life is obviously intended to be a state of probation and trial. No trial of characters is requisite with respect to God, who sees what is in every heart, and perfectly knows what part each man would act, in all the possible situations of fortune. But on account of men themselves, and of the world around them, it was necessary, that trial should take place, and a discrimination of characters be made; in order, that true virtue might be separated from false appearances of it, and the justice of heaven be displayed in its final retributions; in order that the failings of men might be so discovered to themselves, as to afford them proper instruction, and promote their amendment; and in order, that their characters might be shown to the world in every point of view, which could furnish either examples for imitation, or admonitions of danger. The accomplishment of these important purposes required, that human life should not always proceed in one tenor: but that it should both be chequered with many revolutions, and diversified by a variety of employments and ranks; in passing through which, the touchstone might be applied to the characters of

* Prov. xxx, 8, 9.

men, and their hidden virtues or vices explored. Hazael might have appeared in history with a degree of reputation to which he was not entitled, had he continued to act in a subordinate station. At bottom, he was false and unsound. When raised higher in life, the corruption of his heart discovered itself: and he is now held forth with deserved infamy, as a warning to succeeding ages.

In the second place, we learn, from what has been said, the importance of attending, with the utmost care, to the choice which we make of our employment and condition in life. It has been shown, that our external situation frequently operates powerfully on our moral character; and by consequence, that it is strictly connected, not only with our temporal welfare, but with our everlasting happiness or misery. He who might have passed unblamed, and upright, through certain walks of life by unhappily choosing a road where he meets with temptations too strong for his virtue, precipitates himself into shame here, and into endless ruin hereafter. Yet how often is the determination of this most important article left to the chance of accidental connexions, or submitted to the option of youthful fancy and humour? When it is made the subject of serious deliberation, how seldom have they, on whom the decision of it depends, any further view, than so to dispose of one who is coming out into life, as that he may the soonest become rich, or, as it is expressed, make his way to most advantage in the world? Are there no other objects than this to be attended to, in fixing the plan of life? Are there no more sacred and important interests which deserve to be consulted?—You would not willingly place one, whose welfare you studied, in a situation for which you were convinced that his abilities were unequal. These, therefore you examine with care; and on them you rest the ground of your decision. Be per-

suaded, that not abilities merely, but the turn of the temper and the heart, require to be examined with equal attention, in forming the plan of future establishment. Every one has some peculiar weakness, some predominant passion, which exposes him to temptations of one kind more than of another. Early this may be discerned to shoot: and from its first risings, its future growth may be inferred. Anticipate its progress. Consider how it is likely to be affected by succeeding occurrences in life. If you bring one, whom you are rearing up, into a situation, where all the surrounding circumstances shall cherish and mature this fatal principle in his nature, you become in a great measure, answerable for the consequences that follow. In vain you trust to his abilities and powers. Vice and corruption, when they have tainted the heart, are sufficient to over-set the greatest abilities. Nay, too frequently they turn them against the possessor; and render them the instruments of his more speedy ruin.

In the third place, we learn from the history which has been illustrated, never to judge of true happiness, merely from the degree of men's advancement in the world. Always betrayed by appearance, the multitude are caught by nothing so much as by the show and pomp of life. They think every one blest, who is raised far above others in rank. From their earliest years they are taught to fix their views upon worldly elevation, as the ultimate object of their aims; and of all the sources of error in conduct, this is the most general.—Hazael, on the throne of Syria, would, doubtless, be more envied, and esteemed by the multitude a far happier man than, when yet a subject, he was employed by Benhadad to carry his message to Elisha. Yet, O Hazael! how much better had it been for thee never to have known the name or honor of a king, than to have purchased it at the expense of so much guilt—forfeiting thy first and best character—rushing into crimes which were once thine abhorrence—

and becoming a traitor to the native sentiments and dictates of thy heart ! How fatal to thy repose proved that coveted purple, which was drenched by thee in so much innocent blood ! How much more cheerful were thy days, and how much calmer thy nights, in the former periods of thy life, than when, placed on a throne, thy ears were invaded by day with the cries of the miserable whom thou hadst ruined ; and thy slumbers broken by night with the shocking remembrance of thy cruelties and crimes !—Never let us judge by the outside of things ; nor conclude a man to be happy, solely because he is encompassed with wealth or grandeur. Much misery often lurks where it is little suspected by the world. The material inquiries respecting felicity are, not what a man's external condition is, but with what disposition of mind he bears it—whether he be corrupted or improved by it—whether he conduct himself so as to be acceptable to God, and approved of by good men. For these are the circumstances which make the real and important distinctions among the conditions of men. The effects of these are to last for ever, when all worldly distinctions shall be forgotten.

In the fourth place, from all that has been said, we should learn never to be immoderately anxious about our external situation, but to submit our lot with cheerfulness to the disposal of Heaven. To make the best and most prudent arrangements which we can, respecting our condition in life, is matter of high duty. But let us remember, that all the plans that we form are precarious and uncertain. After the utmost precautions taken by human wisdom, no man can foresee the hidden dangers, which may await him in that path of life on which he has pitched. Providence chooses for us, much more wisely than we can choose for our ourselves ; and, from circumstances that appeared at first most unpromising and adverse, often brings forth in the issue both temporal and spiritual felicity. *Who know-*

What is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow? When we consider the darkness of our present state, the implicity of human nature, and the doubtful and ambiguous value of all that we call prosperity, the exhortation of the psalmist comes home with great force on every reflecting mind, Commit thy way unto the Lord. Form thy measures with prudence; but divest thyself of anxiety about the issue. Instead of seeking to order thine own lot, acquiesce in the appointment of Heaven, and follow, without hesitation, the call of Providence, and of duty. In whatever situation of life God shall place thee, look up devoutly to him for grace and assistance; and study to act the part assigned thee with a faithful and upright heart. Thus shalt thou have peace within thyself, while thy course is going on: and when it draws towards a close, with satisfaction thou shalt review thy conduct. For, after all the toils and labours of life, and all the vain struggles which we maintain for pre-eminence and distinction, we shall find, at the conclusion of the whole scene, that to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole of man.*

* Psalm xxxvii. 5.

S E R M O N XXVIII.

On the BENEFITS to be derived from the HOUSE of MOURNING.



ECCLESIASTES, vii. 2, 3, 4.

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

MANY of the maxims contained in this book of Ecclesiastes will appear strange sayings to the men of the world. But when they reflect on the character of him who delivers them, they cannot but admit that his tenets deserve a serious and attentive examination. For they are not the doctrines of a pedant, who, from an obscure retirement, declaims against pleasures which he never knew. They are not the invectives of a disappointed man, who takes revenge upon the world, by satirising those enjoyments, which he sought in vain to obtain. They are the conclusions of a great and prosperous prince, who had once given full scope to his desires; who was thoroughly acquainted with life, in its most flattering scenes; and who now, reviewing all that he had enjoyed, delivers to us the result of long experience, and tried wisdom. None of his principles seem, at first view, more dubious and exceptionable than those which the text presents. To assert, that sorrow is preferable to mirth, and the *house of mourning to the house of feasting*—to advise men to choose mortification and sadness, when it is in their power to indulge in joy—may appear harsh and unreasonable doctrines. They may, perhaps,

be accounted enemies to the innocent enjoyment of life, who give countenance to so severe a system, and thereby increase the gloom, which already sits sufficiently heavy on the condition of man. But let this censure be suspended, until we examine with care into the spirit and meaning of the sentiments here delivered.

It is evident, that the wise man does not prefer sorrow, upon its own account, to mirth; or represent sadness as a state more eligible than joy. He considers it in the light of discipline only. He views it with reference to an end. He compares it with certain improvements which he supposes it to produce; when *the heart is made better by the sadness of the countenance, and the living to lay to heart what is the end of all men.* Now, if great and lasting benefits are found to result from occasional sadness, these, sure, may be capable of giving it the preference to some fleeting sensations of joy. The means, which he recommends, in order to our obtaining those benefits, are to be explained according to the principles of sound reason; and to be understood with those limitations, which the eastern style, in delivering moral precepts, frequently requires. He bids us *go to the house of mourning*: but he does not command us to dwell there. When he prefers sorrow to laughter, he is not to be understood as prohibiting all mirth; as requiring us to wear a perpetual cloud on our brow, and to sequestrate ourselves from every cheerful entertainment of social life. Such an interpretation would be inconsistent with many other exhortations in his own writings, which recommend temperate and innocent joy. It would not suit with the proper discharge of the duties which belong to us as members of society; and would be most opposite to the goodness and benignity of our Creator. The true scope of his doctrine in this passage is, that there is a certain temper and state of heart, which is of far greater consequence

to real happiness, than the habitual indulgence of giddy and thoughtless mirth; that for the attainment and cultivation of this temper, frequent returns of grave reflexion are necessary; that upon this account, it is profitable to give admision to those views of human distress, which tend to awaken such reflexion in the mind; and that thus, from the vicissitudes of sorrow, which we either experience in our own lot, or sympathise with in the lot of others, much wisdom and improvement may be derived. These are the sentiments which I purpose at present to justify and recommend, as most suitable to the character of men and of christians—and not in the least inconsistent with pleasure, rightly understood.

Among the variety of dispositions, which are to be found in the world, some, indeed, require less of this discipline than others. There are persons whose tender and delicate sensibility, either derived from nature, or brought on by repeated afflictions, renders them too deeply susceptible of every mournful impression; whose spirits stand more in need of being supported and cheered, than of being saddened by the dark views of human life. In such cases, we are commanded to *lift up the hands which hang down, and to confirm the feeble knees* *. But this is far from being the common disposition of men. Their minds are in general inclined to levity, much more than to thoughtful melancholy; and their hearts more apt to be contracted and hardened, than to relent with too much facility. I shall therefore endeavour to show them, what bad inclinations their compli-
ance with Solomon's advice would correct—what good dispositions with respect to God, their neighbours, and themselves, it would improve—and how, upon the whole, his doctrine is verified, that *by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better*.

I begin by observing, that the temper recommend-
in the text suits the present constitution of things in

* Isaiah, xxxv. 3. Heb. xii. 12.

this world. Had man been destined for a course of undisturbed enjoyment, perpetual gaiety would then have corresponded to his state; and pensive thought have been an unnatural intrusion. But in a state where all is chequered and mixed—where there is no prosperity without a reverse, and no joy without its attending griefs—where from the house of feasting all must, at one time or other, pass into the house of mourning—it would be equally unnatural, if no admission were given to grave reflexion. The mind of man must be attempered to his condition. Providence, whose wisdom is conspicuous in all its works, has adjusted, with exact proportion, the inward powers to the outward state of every rational being. It has for this purpose implanted the serious and sympathetic feelings in our nature, that they might correspond with the vicissitudes of sorrow in our lot. He, who endeavours, to repel their influence, or to stifle them in unseasonable mirth, acts a violent and unnatural part. He strives with vain effort against the current of things; contradicts the intentions of his Maker; and counteracts the original impulses of his own heart.

It is proper also to observe, that as *the sadness of the countenance* has, in our present situation, a proper and natural place; so it is requisite to the true enjoyment of pleasure. Worldly and sensual men often remark not, till it be too late, that, by the studied efforts of constant repetition, all their pleasures fail. They draw them off so close to the dregs, that they become insipid and nauseous. Hence even *in laughter their heart is sorrowful, and the end of their mirth is heaviness* *. It is only the interposal of serious and thoughtful hours, that can give any lively sensation to the returns of joy. I speak not of those thoughtful hours, too well known to sinners, which proceed from guilty remorse; and which, instead of preparing for future pleasure, damp and sicken

* Prov. xiv. 13.

the moment of enjoyment; but of those, which take rise from the mind retreating into itself, and opening to the sentiments of religion and humanity. Such hours of virtuous sadness brighten the gleams of succeeding joy. They give, to the temperate enjoyments of the pious and humane, a refined and delicate relish, to which the hardened and insensible are entire strangers. For it will be found, that in proportion as the tender affections of the soul are kept awake, how much soever they may sometimes distress the heart, they preserve it open likewise to the most agreeable sensations. He, who never knew the sorrows of friendship, never also knew its joys. He, whose heart cannot relent in the house of mourning, will, in the most social hour of the house of feasting, partake of no more than the lowest part of animal pleasure. Having premised these observations, I proceed to point out the direct effects of a proper attention to the distresses of life upon our moral and religious character.

In the first place, the house of mourning is calculated to give a proper check to our natural thoughtlessness and levity. The indolence of mankind, and their love of pleasure, spread through all characters and ranks some degree of aversion to what is grave and serious. They grasp at any object, either of business or amusement, which makes the present moment pass smoothly away; which carries their thoughts abroad, and saves them from the trouble of reflecting on themselves. With too many, this passes into a habit of constant dissipation. If their fortune and rank allow them to indulge their inclinations, they devote themselves to the pursuit of amusement through all its different forms. The skilful arrangement of its successive scenes, and the preparatory study for shining in each, are the only exertions on which their understanding is employed. Such a mode of life may keep alive, for a

while, a frivolous vivacity. It may improve men in some of those exterior accomplishments, which sparkle in the eyes of the giddy and the vain: but it must sink them in the esteem of all the wise. It renders them strangers to themselves—and useless, if not pernicious, to the world. They lose every manly principle. Their minds become relaxed and effeminate. All that is great or respectable in the human character is buried under a mass of trifles and follies.

If some measures ought to be taken for rescuing the mind from this disgraceful levity—if some principles must be acquired, which may give more dignity and steadiness to conduct—where, I pray you, are these to be looked for? Not surely in the house of feasting, where every object flatters the senses, and strengthens the seductions to which we are already prone—where the spirit of dissipation circulates from heart to heart—and the children of folly mutually admire and are admired. It is in the sober and serious house of mourning, that the tide of vanity is made to turn, and a new direction given to the current of thought. When some affecting incident presents a strong discovery of the deceitfulness of all worldly joy, and rouses our sensibility to human woe—when we behold those, with whom we had lately mingled in the house of feasting, sunk by some of the sudden vicissitudes of life into the vale of misery—or when, in sad silence, we stand by the friend whom we had loved as our own soul, stretched on the bed of death—then is the season when the world begins to appear in a new light—when the heart opens to virtuous sentiments, and is led into that train of reflexion which ought to direct life. He, who before knew not what it was to commune with his heart on any serious subject, now puts the question to himself, for what purpose he was sent forth into this mortal, transitory state—what his fate is likely to be when it concludes—and

what judgment he ought to form, of those pleasures which amuse for a little, but which, he now sees, cannot save the heart from anguish in the evil day? Touched by the hand of thoughtful melancholy, that airy edifice of bliss, which fancy had raised up for him, vanishes away. He beholds, in the place of it, the lonely and barren desert, in which, surrounded with many a disagreeable object, he is left musing upon himself. The time which he has mispent, and the faculties which he has misemployed, his foolish levity and his criminal pursuits, all rise in painful prospect before him. That unknown state of existence, into which, race after race, the children of men pass, strikes his mind with solemn awe. —Is there no course by which he can retrieve his past errors? Is there no superior power, to which he can look up for aid? Is there no plan of conduct, which, if it exempt him not from sorrow, can at least procure him consolation amidst the distressful exigencies of life? Such meditations as these, suggested by the house of mourning, frequently produce a change on the whole character. They revive those sparks of goodness, which were nigh being quite extinguished in the dissipated mind; and give rise to principles of conduct more rational in themselves, and more suitable to the human state.

In the second place, impressions of this nature not only produce moral seriousness, but awaken sentiments of piety, and bring men into the sanctuary of religion. One might, indeed, imagine that the blessings of a prosperous condition would prove the most natural incitements to devotion; and that when men were happy in themselves, and saw nothing but happiness around them, they could not fail gratefully to acknowledge that God who *giveth them all things richly to enjoy*. Yet such is their corruption, that they are never more ready to forget their benefactor, than when loaded with his benefits. The giver is concealed from their careless and inattentive view, by the cloud of his own gifts. When their life conti-

nues to flow in one smooth current, unruffled by any griefs—when they neither receive in their own circumstances, nor allow themselves to receive from the circumstances of others—any admonitions of human instability, they not only become regardless of Providence, but are in hazard of contemning it. Glorifying in their strength, and lifted up by the pride of life into supposed independence, that impious sentiment, if not uttered by the mouth, yet too often lurks in the hearts of many, during their flourishing periods. *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him; and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?*

If such be the tendency of the house of feasting, how necessary is it, that, by some change in their situation, men should be obliged to enter into the house of mourning, in order to recover a proper sense of their dependent state? It is there, when forsaken by the gaieties of the world, and left alone with God, that we are made to perceive how awful his government is—how easily human greatness bends before him—and how quickly all our designs and measures, at his interposal, vanish into nothing. There, when the countenance is sad, and the affections are softened by grief—when we sit apart, involved in serious thought, looking down as from some eminence on those dark clouds that hang over the life of man—the arrogance of prosperity is humbled, and the heart melts under the impressions of religion. Formerly we were taught, but now we see, we feel, how much we stand in need of an Almighty Protector, amidst the changes of this vain world. Our soul cleaves to him, who *despises not, nor abhors the affliction of the afflicted.* Prayer flows forth of its own accord from the relenting heart, that he may be our God, and the God of our friends in distress; that he may never forsake us, while we are sojourning in this land of pilgrimage; may strengthen us under its calamities, and bring us hereafter to those

habitations of rest, where we, and they whom we love, may be delivered from the trials which all are now doomed to endure. The discoveries of his mercy, which he has made in the Gospel of Christ, are viewed with joy, as so many rays of light, sent down from above to dispel, in some degree, the surrounding gloom. A Mediator and Intercessor with the Sovereign of the universe, appear comfortable names: and the resurrection of the just becomes the powerful cordial of grief. In such moments as these, which we may justly call happy moments, the soul participates of all the pleasures of devotion. It feels the power of religion to support and relieve. It is softened, without being broken. It is full, and it pours itself forth; pours itself forth, if we may be allowed to use the expression, into the bosom of its merciful Creator.

In the third place, such serious sentiments produce the happiest effect upon our disposition towards our fellow-creatures, as well as towards God. It is a common and just observation, that they, who have lived always in affluence and ease, strangers to the miseries of life, are liable to contract hardness of heart with respect to all the concerns of others. Wrapped up in themselves, and their own pleasures, they behold with indifference the most affecting scenes of distress. Habituated to indulge all their desires without controul, they become impatient of the least provocation or offence; and are ready to trample on their inferiors, as if they were creatures of a different species from themselves. Is this an amiable temper, or such as becomes a man? When appearing in others, do we not view it with much displeasure? When imputed to ourselves, can we avoid accounting it a severe reproach?

By the experience of distress, this arrogant insensibility of temper is most effectually corrected; as the remembrance of our own sufferings naturally prompts us to feel for others when they suffer. But

if Providence has been so kind, as not to subject us to much of this discipline in our own lot, let us draw improvement from the harder lot of others. Let us sometimes step aside from the smooth and flowery paths in which we are permitted to walk, in order to view the toilsome march of our fellows through the thorny desert. By voluntarily going into the house of mourning—by yielding to the sentiments which it excites, and mingling our tears with those of the afflicted—we shall acquire that humane sensibility which is one of the highest ornaments of the nature of man. Perceiving how much the common distresses of life place us all on a level, and render the high and the low, the rich and the poor, companions in misfortune and mortality, we shall learn to set no man at nought, and, least of any, our afflicted brother.—Prejudices will be extinguished, and benevolence opened and enlarged, when, looking around on the multitude of men, we consider them as a band of fellow-travellers in the valley of woe, where it ought to be the office of every one to alleviate, as much as possible, the common burden.—While the vain and the licentious are revelling in the midst of extravagance and riot, how little do they think of those scenes of sore distress, which are going on at that moment throughout the world—multitudes struggling for a poor subsistence, to support the wife and the children whom they love, and who look up to them with eager eyes for that bread which they can hardly procure—multitudes groaning under sickness, in desolate cottages, unattended and unmourned—many apparently in a better situation of life, pining away in secret with concealed griefs—families weeping over the beloved friends whom they have lost, or, in all the bitterness of anguish, bidding those who are just expiring, the last adieu!

May we not appeal to the heart of every good man, nay almost to the heart of every man who

has not divested himself of his natural feelings, whether the admission of such views of human life might not sometimes at least, furnish a more worthy employment to the mind, than that *mirth of fools*, which Solomon compares to *the crackling of thorns under a pot* *—the transient burst of unmeaning joy—the empty explosion of giddiness and levity? Those sallies of jollity, in the house of feasting, are often forced from a troubled mind; like flashes from the black cloud, which, after a momentary effulgence, are succeeded by thicker darkness. Whereas compassionate affections, even at the time when they draw tears from our eyes for human misery, convey satisfaction to the heart. The gracious appointment of heaven has ordained, that sympathetic pains should always be accompanied with a certain degree of pleasure—on purpose that we might be more interested in the case of the distressed, and that, by this mysterious bond, man might be linked closer to man. The inward satisfaction, which belongs to the compassionate affections, is, at the same time, heightened by the approbation which they receive from our reason—and by the consciousness which they afford us, of feeling what men and christians ought to feel.

In the fourth place, the disposition recommended in the text, not only improves us in piety and humanity, but likewise assists us in self-government, and the due moderation of our desires. The house of mourning is the school of temperance and sobriety. Every wise man will find it for his interest to enter into it sometimes, of his own accord, lest otherwise he be compelled to take up his dwelling there. Seasonable interruptions of our pleasures are necessary to their prolongation. For, continued scenes of luxury and indulgence hasten to a melancholy issue. The house of feasting too often becomes an avenue to the house of mourning. Short,

* Eccles. vii. 6.

to the licentious, is the interval between them; and speedy the transition from the one to the other.

But supposing that, by prudent management, the men of pleasure could avoid the pernicious effects which intemperance and dissoluteness are likely to produce on their health or their fortune—can they also prevent those disorders, which such habits will introduce into their minds? Can they escape that wrath of the Almighty, which will infallibly pursue them for their sins, both here and hereafter? For whence, so much as from the unchecked pursuit of pleasure, do all those crimes arise, which stain the characters of men with the deepest guilt, and expose them to the severest judgments of heaven? Whence, then, is the corrective of those mischiefs to be sought, but from such a discipline as shall moderate that intemperate admiration of the world which gave rise to the evil? By repairing sometimes to the house of mourning, you would chasten the looseness of fancy, abate the eagerness of passion, and afford scope to reason for exerting her restraining powers. You would behold this world stripped of its false colours, and reduced to its proper level. Many an important instruction you would receive from the humiliation of the proud, the mortification of the vain, and the sufferings of the voluptuous, which you would see exemplified before you, in the chambers of sorrow, of sickness, and of death. You would then be taught, *to rejoice as though you rejoiced not, and to weep as though you weeped not*; that is, neither in joy, nor in grief, to run to excess; but *to use this world so as not to abuse it; contemplating the fashion thereof as passing away.*

Moreover, you would there learn the important lesson of suiting your mind, before-hand, to what you had reason to expect from the world; a lesson too seldom studied by mankind, and to the neglect of which, much of their misery, and much of their guilt is to be charged. By turning away their eyes from

the dark side of life—by looking at the world only in one light, and that a flattering one—they form their measures on a false plan, and are necessarily deceived and betrayed. Hence, the vexation of succeeding disappointment and blasted hope. Hence, their criminal impatience of life, and their bitter accusations of God and man; when, in truth, they have reason to accuse only their own folly. Thou who wouldst act like a wise man, and build thy house on the rock, and not on the sand, contemplate human life not only in the sunshine, but in the shade. Frequent the house of mourning, as well as the house of mirth. Study the nature of that state in which thou art placed; and balance its joys with its sorrows. Thou seest that the cup, which is held forth to the whole human race, is mixed. Of its bitter ingredients, expect that thou art to drink thy portion. Thou seest the storm hovering every where in the clouds around thee. Be not surprised if on thy head it shall break. Lower, therefore, thy sails. Dismiss thy florid hopes; and come forth prepared either to act or to suffer, according as heaven shall decree. Thus shalt thou be excited to take the properest measures for defence, by endeavouring to secure an interest in his favour, who, *in the time of trouble, can hide thee in his pavilion*. Thy mind shall adjust itself to follow the order of his providence. Thou shalt be enabled, with equanimity and steadiness, to hold thy course through life.

In the fifth place, by accustoming ourselves to such serious views of life, our excessive fondness for life itself will be moderated, and our minds gradually formed to wish and to long for a better world. If we know, that our continuance here is to be short, and that we are intended by our Maker for a more lasting state, and for employments of a nature altogether different from those which now occupy the busy, or amuse the vain, we must surely be convinced that it is of the highest consequence

to prepare ourselves for so important a change. This view of our duty is frequently held up to us in the sacred writings; and hence religion becomes, though not a morose, yet a grave and solemn principle, calling off the attention of men from light pursuits, to those which are of eternal moment. *What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul*—if he shall lead a life of thoughtless mirth on earth, and exclude himself from eternal felicity in heaven? Wordly affection and sensual pleasure depress all our higher powers. They form an unnatural union between the human soul and this earth, which was only designed for its temporary abode. They attach it too strongly to objects from which it must shortly part. They alienate its desires from God and Heaven, and deject it with slavish and unmanly fears of death. Whereas, by the discipline of religious seriousness, it is gradually loosened from the fetters of sense. Assisted to discover the vanity of this world, it rises above it; and in the hours of sober thought, cultivates connexion with those divine and immortal objects, among which it is designed to dwell.

Enough has now been said to convince any thinking person of the justice and reasonableness of the maxims in the text; and to show, that, on various occasions, *sorrow may be better than laughter*. Wouldst thou acquire the habit of recollection, and fix the principles of thy conduct—wouldst thou be led up to thy Creator and Redeemer, and be formed to sentiments of piety and devotion—wouldst thou be acquainted with those mild and tender affections, which delight the compassionate and humane—wouldst thou have the power of sensual appetites tamed and corrected, and thy soul raised above the ignoble love of life, and fear of death? Go, my brother, go—not to scenes of pleasure and riot, not to the house of feasting and mirth—but to the silent house of mourning; and adventure to dwell for a

while among objects that will soften thy heart. Contemplate the lifeless remains of what once was fair and flourishing. Bring home to thyself the vicissitudes of life. Recal the remembrance of the friend, the parent, or the child, whom thou tenderly lovedst. Look back on the days of former years; and think on the companions of thy youth, who now sleep in the dust. Let the vanity, the mutability, and the sorrows of the human estate, rise in full prospect before thee: and though *thy countenance* may be *made sad*, *thy heart shall be made better*. This sadness, though for the present it dejects, yet shall in the end fortify thy spirit; inspiring thee with such sentiments, and prompting such resolutions as shall enable thee to enjoy, with more real advantage, the rest of life. Dispositions of this nature form one part of the character of those *mourners*, whom our Saviour hath pronounced *blessed*—and of those to whom it is promised, that *sowing in tears they shall reap in joy**. A great difference there is between being serious and melancholy; and a melancholy, too, there is of that kind, which deserves to be sometimes indulged.

Religion hath on the whole provided for every good man abundant materials of consolation and relief. How dark soever the present face of nature may appear, it dispels the darkness, when it brings into view the entire system of things, and extends our survey to the whole kingdom of God. It represents what we now behold as only a part, and a small part, of the general order. It assures us, that though here, for wise ends, misery and sorrow are permitted to have place, these temporary evils shall, in the end, advance the happiness of all who love God, and are faithful to their duty. It shows them this mixed and confused scene vanishing by degrees away, and preparing the introduction of that state, where the house of mourning shall be shut up for

* Matth. v. 4. Psalm cxxvi. 5.

ever—where no tears are seen, and no groans heard—where no hopes are frustrated, and no virtuous connexions dissolved—but where, under the light of the divine countenance, goodness shall flourish in perpetual felicity. Thus, though religion may occasionally chasten our mirth with sadness of countenance, yet under that sadness it allows not the heart of good men to sink. It calls upon them to rejoice, *because the Lord reigneth, who is their Rock, and the most high God, who is their Redeemer.* Reason likewise joins her voice with that of religion; forbidding us to make peevish and unreasonable complaints of human life, or injuriously to ascribe to it more evil than it contains. Mixed as the present state is, she pronounces, that, generally, if not always, there is more happiness than misery, more pleasure than pain, in the condition of man.

S E R M O N XXIX.

On the divine GOVERNMENT of the PASSIONS of MEN.

PSALM lxxvi. 10.

Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

THIS psalm appears to have been composed on occasion of some remarkable deliverance obtained by the Jewish nation. It is generally understood to have been written in the reign of Hezekiah, and to refer to the formidable invasion of Judæa by Sennacherib; when the angel of the Lord, in one night, discomfited the whole Assyrian host, and

smote them with sudden destruction. To this interposition of the divine arm, those expressions in the context may naturally be applied: *Then brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, the sword, and the battle. The stout-hearted are spoiled: they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and the horse are cast into a dead sleep.* In the text, we have the wise and religious reflexion of the psalmist upon the violent designs which had been carried on by the enemies of his country, and upon the issue to which Providence had brought them. *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee.* By the *wrath of man*, we are to understand all that the impetuosity of human passions can devise or execute—the projects of ambition and resentment—the rage of persecution—the fury of war—the disorders which violence produces in private life—and the public commotions which it excites in the world. All these shall *praise God*, not with their intention and design, nor by their native tendency; but by those wise and good purposes, which his providence makes them accomplish; from their poison extracting health, and converting things, which in themselves are pernicious, into instruments of his glory, and of public benefit: so that, though *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*, it is nevertheless forced and compelled to minister to his praise. The psalmist adds, *the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain*; that is, God will allow scope to the wrath of man, as far as it answers his good purposes, and is subservient to his praise: the rest of it shall be curbed and bound up. When it would attempt to go beyond its prescribed limit, he says to it, as to the waters of the ocean, *Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.*

All this shall be fully verified and declared by the last issue of things; when we shall be able more clearly to trace the divine administration through

its several steps, by seeing the consummation of the whole. In some cases, it may be reserved for this period to unfold the mysterious wisdom of heaven. But in general, as much of the divine conduct is at present manifest, as gives just ground for the assertion in the text. In the sequel of this discourse, I shall endeavour to illustrate and confirm it. I shall show in what manner the wrath of man is made to praise the power, the wisdom, the justice, and the goodness of God.

I begin with this observation, that in order to accomplish the great purposes carried on by the Government of the Universe, it is necessary that the divine perfections be displayed before mankind in a sensible and striking manner. We are not to conceive the Supreme Being as hereby seeking praise to himself, from a principle of ostentation or vain-glory. Independent and self-sufficient, he rests in the enjoyment of his own beatitude. His praise consists in the general order and welfare of his creation. This end cannot be attained, unless mankind be made to feel the subjection under which they are placed. They must be taught to admire and adore their Sovereign. They must be overawed by the view of a high hand, which can at pleasure controul their actions, and render them subservient to purposes which they neither foresaw nor intended. Hence the propriety of God's making *the wrath of man to praise him*. We easily conceive in what manner the heavens and the earth are said to praise God, as they are standing monuments of that supreme perfection, which is displayed in their creation. The virtues of good men obviously praise him, by exhibiting his image, and reflecting back his glory. But when even the vices and inordinate passions of bad men are made to praise him, in consequence of the useful purposes which they are compelled to accomplish, this, in a particular manner, distinguishes and signalizes a divine hand; this opens a more wonderful prof-

pect of the administration of heaven, than if all its subjects had been loyal and willingly obedient, and the course of human affairs had proceeded in a quiet and regular tenor.

I. The *wrath of man* redounds to the praise of divine power. It brings it forth with full and awful lustre, to the view of mankind. To reign with sovereign command amidst the most turbulent and disordered state of things, both in the natural and moral world, is the peculiar glory of omnipotence. Hence God is described in scripture as *sitting on the flood, riding on the wings of the wind, dwelling in the darkness and the tempest*; that is, making the most violent powers in the universe minister to his will, giving them scope, or restraining them, according as suits the purposes of his dominion. As he stills at his pleasure, *the raging of the seas, and the noise of their waves*; in like manner, *he stills the tumults of the people*. When the passions of men are most inflamed, and their designs just ripe for bursting into execution, often, by some unexpected interposition, he calls upon the world to observe, that there is one higher than the highest on earth, who can frustrate their devices in a moment, and command *the earth to be still before him*. Proud fleets, destined to carry destruction to neighbouring kingdoms, may cover the ocean. He blows with his wind, and they are scattered. Mighty armies may go forth to the field, in all the glory of human strength; but the issues of battle are with him. He suspends on high the invisible balance, which weighs the fate of nations. According as the scale inclines, he gives to some slight event the power of deciding the contest. He clouds the sky with darkness, or opens the windows of heaven to let forth their flood. He dejects the hearts of the brave with sudden terror; and renders the hands of the strong weak and unperforming at the critical moment. A thousand unseen ministers stand ready to be the instruments

of his power, in humbling the pride, and checking the efforts of the wrath of man. Thus, in the instance of haughty Sennacherib and that boasted tempest of wrath which he threatened to pour upon all the Jewish nation; *I will put my hook, says the Almighty, in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips; and I will turn thee back by the way which thou camest* *. In that night, the destroying angel smote the host; and he departed with shame of face to his own land. *When the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing—when the kings of the earth set themselves, and its rulers take council together, He, that sitteth in the heavens, shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision* †.

II. The *wrath of man* is made to praise the wisdom, as well as the power of God. Nothing displays more remarkably the admirable council of heaven, than its arranging the train of events in such a manner, that the unruly passions of the wicked shall contribute to overthrow their own designs. History abounds with examples of their being rendered the unconscious ministers of Providence, to accomplish purposes directly opposite to those which they had in view. Thus the cruelty of the sons of Jacob, in pursuing the destruction of their brother Joseph, became the means of effecting his high advancement. Thus the wrath of Pharaoh against the Israelites, and his unjust attempts to detain them in bondage, proved the occasion of bringing them forth from the land of slavery, with signal marks of the favour of heaven. Thus the inhuman plan, which Haman had formed for ruining Mordecai, and extirpating the whole Jewish nation, paved the way for Mordecai's high promotion, and for the triumph of the Jews over all their enemies.

After this manner, the Almighty *snareth the wicked in the works of their hands*; and erects his own council upon the ruin of theirs. Those events, which, viewed apart, appear as spots in the divine adminis-

* 2 Kings, xix. 28.

† Psalm ii. 1, 2, 3.

tration, when considered in connexion with all their consequences, are often found to give it additional lustre. The beauty and magnificence of the universe are much heightened, by its being an extensive and complicated system; in which a variety of springs are made to play, and a multitude of different movements are, with most admirable art, regulated and kept in order. Interfering interests, and jarring passions, are in such manner balanced against one another—such proper checks are placed on the violence of human pursuits—and the *wrath of man* is made so to hold its course, that how opposite soever the several motions seem to be, yet they concur and meet at last in one direction. While, among the multitudes that dwell on the face of the earth, some are submissive to the divine authority—some rise up in rebellion against it—others, absorbed in their pleasures and pursuits, are totally inattentive to it—they are all so moved by an imperceptible influence from above, that the zeal of the dutiful, the wrath of the rebellious, and the indifference of the careless, contribute finally to the glory of God. All are governed in such a way as suits their powers, and is consistent with rational freedom: yet all are subjected to the necessity of fulfilling the eternal purposes of heaven. This depth of divine wisdom, in the administration of the universe, exceeds all human comprehension, and affords everlasting subject of adoration and praise.

III. The *wrath of man* praises the justice of God, by being employed as the instrument of inflicting punishment upon sinners. Did bad men trace the course of events in their life with attentive eye, they might easily discover the greatest part of the disasters which they suffer, to be brought upon them by their own ungoverned passions. The succession of causes and effects is so contrived by Providence, that the wrath, which they meant to pour forth on others, frequently recoils, by its effects, upon them—

selves. But supposing them to escape those external mischiefs, which violent passions naturally occasion, they cannot evade the internal misery which they produce. The constitution of things is framed with such profound wisdom, that the divine laws, in every event, execute themselves against the sinner, and carry their sanction in their own bosom. The Supreme Being has no occasion to unlock the prisons of the deep, or to call down the thunder from heaven, in order to punish the *wrath of man*. He carries on the administration of justice with more simplicity and dignity. It is sufficient, that he allow those fierce passions which render bad men the disturbers of others, to operate on their own hearts. He delivers them up to themselves, and they become their own tormentors. Before the world they may disguise their sufferings: but it is well known, that to be inwardly torn with despite, revenge, and wrathful passions, is the most intense of all misery. In thus connecting the punishment with the crime, making their *own wickedness to reprove them, and their backslidings to correct them*, the avenging hand of a righteous Governor is conspicuous; and thus the observation of the psalmist is fully verified: *the wicked have drawn out their sword and bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy: but their sword shall enter into their own heart* *.

The *wrath of man* also praises the justice of God in the punishment of other criminals, as well as of the wrathful themselves. Ambitious and lawless men are let loose upon each other, that without any supernatural interposition, they may fulfil the just vengeance of heaven in their mutual destruction. They may occasionally be cemented together by conspiracy against the just: but as no firm nor lasting bond can unite them, they become at last the prey of mutual jealousy, strife, and fraud. For a time they may go on, and seem to prosper. The justice

* Psalm xxxvii. 14, 15.

of heaven may appear to slumber; but it is awake, and only waits till the measure of their iniquity be full. God represents himself in scripture as sometimes permitting wickedness to arise to an overgrown height, on purpose that its ruin may be the greater, and more exemplary. He says to the tyrant of Egypt, that *for this cause he had raised him up*, that is, had allowed him to prosper and be exalted, *that he might show in him his power; and that his name might be declared throughout all the earth* *. The divine administration is glorified in the punishment contrived for the workers of iniquity, as well as in the reward prepared for the righteous. *This is the purpose which the Lord hath purposed upon all the earth; and this is the hand that is stretched forth over all the nations* †.

IV. The *wrath of man* is made to praise the goodness of God. This is the most unexpected of its effects; and therefore requires to be the most fully illustrated. All the operations of the government of the Deity may be ultimately resolved into goodness. His power, and wisdom, and justice, all conduce to general happiness and order. Among the means, which he uses for accomplishing this end, it will be found, that the wrath of man, through his over-ruling direction, possesses a considerable place.

First, It is employed by God as an useful instrument of discipline and correction to the virtuous. The storms, which ambition and pride raise among mankind, he permits with the same intention that he sends forth tempests among the elements; to clear the atmosphere of noxious vapours, and to purify it from that corruption which all things contract by too much rest. When wicked men prevail in their designs, and exercise the power which they have gained with a heavy and oppressive hand, the virtuous are apt to exclaim, in bitterness of soul, Where is the Lord? and where the sceptre of righteousness and truth? *Hath God forgotten to be gracious?*

* Exod. ix. 16.

† Isaiah, xiv. 26.

or doth he indeed see, and is there knowledge in the Most High?—Their oppressors are, in truth, no more than the ministers of God to them for good. He sees, that they stand in need of correction, and therefore raises up enemies against them, in order to cure the intemperance of prosperity; and to produce, in the serious hours of affliction, proper reflexions upon their duty, and their past errors.

In this light the disturbers of the earth are often represented in scripture, as scourges in the hand of God, employed to inflict chastisement upon a degenerating people. They are commissioned for the execution of righteous and wise purposes, concealed from themselves: and when their commission is fulfilled, they are recalled, and destroyed. Of this we have a remarkable example, in the use which God made of the king of Assyria, with respect to the people of Israel: *I will send him against an hypocritical nation: and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey. Howbeit, he meaneth not so: neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off nations not a few. Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks**. In vain, then, doth the wrath of man lift itself up against God. *He saith, by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?* All things, whether they will it or not, must work together for good to them that love God. The wrath of man, among the rest, fills up the place assigned to it by the ordination of heaven. The violent enemy, the proud conqueror, and the oppressive tyrant, possess only the same station with the famine, the pestilence, and the flood. Their

* Isaiah, x. 6, 7, 12.

triumphs are no more than the accomplishment of God's correction: and the remainder of their wrath shall be restrain.

Secondly, God makes the *wrath of man* contribute to the benefit of the virtuous, by rendering it the means of improving and signalizing their graces—and of raising them, thereby, to higher honor and glory. Had human affairs proceeded in an orderly train, and no opposition been made to religion and virtue, by the violence of the wicked, what room would have been left for some of the highest and most generous exertions of the soul of man? How many shining examples of fortitude, constancy, and patience, would have been lost to the world? What a field of virtues, peculiar to a state of discipline, had lain uncultivated? Spirits of a higher order possess a state of established virtue, that stands in need of no such trials and improvements. But to us, who are only under education for such a state, it belongs, to pass through the furnace, that our souls may be tried, refined, and brightened. We must stand the conflict, that we may be graced and crowned as conquerors. The *wrath of man* opens the field to glory; calls us forth to the most distinguished exercise of active virtue: and forms us to all those suffering graces, which are among the highest ornaments of the human soul. It is thus, that the illustrious band of true patriots and heroes, of confessors and martyrs, have been set forth to the admiration of all ages, as *lights of the world*; while the rage and fury of enemies, instead of bearing them down, have only served to exalt and dignify them more.

Thirdly, the *wrath of man* is often made to advance the temporal prosperity of the righteous. The occasional distresses, which it brings upon them, frequently lay the foundation of their future success. The violence, with which wicked men pursue their resentment, defeats its own purpose; and engages

the world, on the side of the virtuous, whom they persecute. The attempts of malice to blacken and defame them, bring forth their characters with more advantage to the view of impartial beholders. The extremities, to which they are reduced by injustice and oppression, rouse their courage and activity; and often give occasion to such vigorous efforts in their just defence, as overcome all opposition, and terminate in prosperity and success. Even in cases, where the *wrath of man* appears to prevail over the peaceable and the just, it is frequently, in its issue, converted into a blessing. How many have had reason to be thankful, for being disappointed by their enemies, in designs which they earnestly pursued, but which, if successfully accomplished, they have afterwards seen would have occasioned their ruin! *Who so is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord* *.

While the *wrath of man* thus praises God, by the advantages which it is made to bring to good men, as individuals, the divine hand is equally apparent in the similar effects which it is appointed to produce to nations and societies. When wars and commotions shake the earth—when factions rage, and intestine divisions embroil kingdoms that before were flourishing—Providence seems, at first view, to have abandoned public affairs to the misrule of human passions. Yet from the midst of this confusion order is often made to spring; and from these mischiefs lasting advantages to arise. By such convulsions, nations are roused from that dangerous lethargy, into which flowing wealth, long peace, and growing effeminacy of manners had sunk them. They are awakened to discern their true interests; and taught to take proper measures for security and defence against all their foes. Inveterate prejudices are corrected; and latent sources of danger are discovered. Public spirit is called forth: and larger

* Psalm cvii. **43**.

views of national happiness are formed. The corruptions, to which every government is liable, are often rectified by a ferment in the political body: as noxious humours in the animal frame are carried off by the shock of a disease. Attempts made against a wise and well-established civil constitution, tend in the issue to strengthen it: and the disorders of licentiousness and faction, teach men more highly to prize the blessings of tranquillity and legal protection.

Fourthly, *the wrath of man*, when it breaks forth in the persecution of religion, praises the divine goodness, by being rendered conducive to the advancement of truth, and propagation of religion in the world. The church of God, since the day of its infancy, hath never been entirely exempted from the wrath of the world: and in those ages during which it was most exposed to that wrath, it hath always flourished the most. In vain the policy and the rage of men united their efforts to extinguish this divine light. Though all the four winds blew against it, it only shone brighter, and flamed higher. *Many waters could not quench it, nor all the floods drown it.* The constancy and fortitude of those who suffered for the truth, had a much greater effect in increasing the number of converts, than all the terror and cruelty of persecutors in diminishing it. By this means the *wrath of man* was made to turn against itself, to the destruction of its own purpose; like waves, which, assaulting a rock with impotent fury, discover its immovable stability, while they dash themselves in pieces at its feet.

I shall only add one other instance of the *wrath of man* praising God, by accomplishing ends of most extensive benefit to mankind. Never did the rage and malice of the wicked imagine that they had obtained a more complete triumph, than in the death of Jesus Christ. When they had executed their purpose of making him suffer as a malefactor, they were confident that they had extinguished his name, and discomfited his fol-

lowers for ever. Behold how feeble are the efforts of the wrath of man against the decree of heaven! All that they intended to overthrow, they most effectually established. The death of Christ was, in the councils of Heaven, the spring of everlasting life to the faithful. The cross, on which he suffered with apparent ignominy, became the standard of eternal honor to him—the ensign under which his followers assembled, and triumphed. He who, at his pleasure, *restrains the remainder of wrath*, suffered the rage of our Saviour's enemies to suggest no other things to them than what, long before, he had determined, and his prophets had foretold. They all conspired to render the whole scene of Christ's sufferings exactly conformable to the original predicted plan of divine mercy and goodness: and each of them contributed his share to accomplish that great undertaking, which none of them in the least understood, or meant to promote. So remarkable an instance as this, fully ascertained in scripture, of the *wrath of man* ministering to the designs of heaven, ought to be frequently in our eye; as an exemplification of the conduct of Providence in many other cases, where we have not so much light afforded us, for tracing its ways.

By this induction of particulars, the doctrine contained in the text is plainly and fully verified. We have seen, that the disorders, which the pride and passions of men occasion in the world, though they take rise from the corruption of human nature, in his fallen state, yet are so over-ruled by Providence, as to redound to his honor and glory who governs all. They illustrate before the world the divine perfections in the administration of the universe. They serve the purposes of moral and religious improvement to the souls of men. By a secret tendency, they advance the welfare of those whom they appear to threaten with evil. Surely, O God! *the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou*

restrain.—In thy hand it is; and thou never lettest it forth but in weight and measure. It is wild and intractable in its nature; but thou tamest it. It is blind and headlong in its impulse; but thou directest it. It struggles continually to break its chain; but thou confinest it; thou retrenchest all the superfluity of its fury.—Let us now consider, what improvement is to be made of this meditation on the ways of Providence.

In the first place, let it lead us to a religious contemplation of the hand of God, in all the transactions of the world. In the ordinary course of human affairs, we behold a very mixed and busy scene—the passions of men variously agitated—and new changes daily taking place upon this stage of time. We behold peace and war alternately returning; the fortunes of private men rising and falling; and states and nations partaking of the same vicissitude. In all this, if we attend only to the operation of external causes, and to the mere rotation of events, we view no more than the inanimate part of nature; we stop at the surface of things; we contemplate the great spectacle which is presented to us, not with the eyes of rational and intelligent beings. The life and beauty of the universe arises from the view of that wisdom and goodness which animates and conducts the whole, and unites all the parts in one great design. There is an eternal mind, who puts all those wheels in motion; himself remaining for ever at rest. Nothing is void of God. Even in the passions and ragings of men, he is to be found: and where they imagine they guide themselves, they are guided and controuled by his hand. What solemn thoughts and devout affections ought this meditation to inspire—when, in viewing the affairs of the world, we attend not merely to the actings of men, but to the ways of God—and consider ourselves, and all our concerns, as included in his high administration!

In the second place, the doctrine, which has been illustrated, should prevent us from censuring

Providence, on account of any seeming disorders and evils which at present take place in the world. The various instances, which have been pointed out in this discourse, of human passion and wickedness rendered subservient to wise and useful ends, give us the highest reason to conclude, that, in all other cases of seeming evil, the like ends are carried on. This ought to satisfy our mind, even when the prospect is most dark and discouraging. The plans of divine wisdom are too large and comprehensive to be discerned by us in all their extent; and where we see only by parts, we must frequently be at a loss in judging of the whole. *The way of God is in the sea, and his path in the great waters: his footsteps are not known**. But although thou sayest, thou canst not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him †. As, in the natural world, no real deformity is found, nothing but what has either some ornament, or some use; so, in the moral world, the most irregular and deformed appearances contribute in one way or other, to the order of the whole. The Supreme Being, from the most opposite and disagreeing principles, forms universal concord; and adapts even the most harsh and dissonant notes to the harmony of his praise. As he hath reared the goodly frame of nature from various and jarring elements, and hath settled it in peace; so he hath formed such an union, by his providence, of the more various interests, and more jarring passions of men, that they all conspire to his glory, and cooperate for general good.—How amazing is that wisdom, which comprehends such infinite diversities, and contrarities, within its scheme! How powerful that hand, which bends to its own purpose the good and the bad, the busy and the idle, the friends and the foes of truth—which obliges them all to hold on their course to his glory, though divided from one another by a multiplicity of pursuits, and dif-

* Psalm lxxvii. 19.

† Job, xxxv. 14.

fering often from themselves—and while they all move at their own freedom, yet by a secret influence, winds and turns them at his will! *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out*!*

In the third place, we see, from what has been said, how much reason there is for submission to the decrees of Heaven. Whatever distresses we suffer from the *wrath of man*, we have ground to believe that they befall not in vain. In the midst of human violence, or oppression, we are not left to be the sport of fortune. Higher counsels are concerned. Wise and good designs are going on. God is always carrying forward his own purposes; and if these terminate in his glory, which is ever the same with the felicity of the righteous, is not this a sufficient reason for our calm and cheerful acquiescence?

Hence also, to conclude, arises the most powerful argument for studying, with zealous assiduity, to gain the favour and protection of the Almighty. If his displeasure hang over our heads, all things around us may be just objects of terror. For against him, there is no defence. The most violent powers in nature are ministers to him. Formidable, indeed, may prove the *wrath of man*, if he be pleased to let it forth against us. To him, but not to us, it belongs to restrain it at pleasure. Whereas, when we are placed under his protection, all human wrath is divested of its terrors. *If he be for us, who or what can be against us?* Let us pursue the measures, which he hath appointed, for obtaining his grace, by faith, repentance, and a holy life, and we shall have no reason to be *afraid of evil tidings: our hearts will be fixed, trusting in the Lord*. When the religious fear of God possesses the heart, it expels the ignoble fear of man; and becomes the principle of courage and magnanimity. The Lord is *a buckler and a shield to them that serve him. When he ariseth, his enemies*

* Rom. xi. 33.

shall be scattered, as smoke is driven away, and as chaff before the wind. He giveth strength and victory to his people: he clotheth them with salvation. The wrath of man shall praise him: and the remainder of wrath shall be restrain.

S E R M O N X X X .

*On the IMPORTANCE of RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE
to MANKIND.*

(Preached before the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge.)

ISAIAH, xi. 9.

*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord,
as the waters cover the sea.*

THIS passage of scripture is understood, by all christian interpreters, to refer to the days of the gospel. The prophet describes, in the context, the auspicious influence of the Messiah's reign, as extending over all nature, and producing universal felicity. The full accomplishment of this prediction is yet future; and respects some more advanced period of the kingdom of God, when true religion shall universally prevail, and the native tendency of the gospel attain its entire effect. In the prospect of this event, the prophet seems to rise above himself; and celebrates that happy age in the most sublime strain of eastern poetry. He opens a beautiful view of the state of the world, as a state of returning innocence. He represents all nature flourishing in peace—discord and guile abolished—the most hostile natures reconciled, and the most savage reformed and tamed. *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb; and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion,*

and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The lion shall eat straw like the ox: and the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp: and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockat ice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

Upon reading these words, we must immediately perceive the great encouragement which they give to all good designs for promoting religion in the world. When we engage in these, we have the comfort of being engaged, not only in a good cause, but also in one that shall undoubtedly be successful. For we are here assured, by the divine promise, that truth and righteousness shall at length, prevail, and that the increasing influence of religion shall introduce general happiness. It is a pleasing and animating reflexion, that, in carrying on such designs, we act upon the divine plan, and co-operate with God for advancing the kingdom of the Messiah. We have no reason to be discouraged by any unfavourable circumstances, which at present oppose our pious endeavours. Though the ignorance, superstition, and corruption, which now fill so great a part of the world, have a dark and mysterious aspect; it is not beyond the power of that Supreme Being who brings light out of darkness, to clear up those perplexing appearances, and gradually to extricate mankind from the labyrinth of ignorance and error. Let us consider how improbable it seemed, when the gospel was first published, that it should extend so far, and overthrow so much established superstition, as it has already done. There is nothing, in the present state of the world, to render it more unlikely, that it shall one day be universally received, and prevail in its full influence. At the rise of christianity, the disproportion was, at least, as great between the apparent human causes, and the effect which has actually been produced, as there is, in our age, between the circumstances of religion

in the world; and the effect which we farther expect. *The Sun of righteousness* having already exerted its influence, in breaking through the thickest darkness, we may justly hope, that it is powerful enough to dispel all remaining obscurity; and that it will ascend, by degrees, to that perfect day, when *healing shall be under its wings* to all the nations. *A little one shall become a thousand; and a small one, a strong nation. I the Lord will hasten it in its time* *.

Besides, the prediction, which the text contains, of the future success of religion, it points out also a precise connexion between the increase of religious knowledge, and the happiness of mankind. *The knowledge of the Lord filling the earth*, is assigned as the cause, why *they shall not hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of God*. To this I am now to lead your thoughts—as a subject both suited to the occasion of the present meeting, and proper to be illustrated in times, wherein total indifference to religious principles appears to gain ground. Whether christianity shall be propagated farther or not, is treated as a matter of no great concern to mankind. The opinion prevails among many, that moral virtue may subsist, with equal advantage, independent of religion. For moral principles, great regard is professed: but articles of religious belief are held to be abstract tenets, remote from life—points of mere speculation and debate, the influence of which is very inconsiderable on the actions of men. The general conduct, it is contended, will always proceed upon views and principles, which have more relation to the present state of things: and religious knowledge can therefore stand in no necessary connexion with their happiness and prosperity. How adverse such opinions are both to the profession and practice of religion, is abundantly evident. How adverse they are to the general welfare and real in-

* Isaiah, lx. 22.

terests of mankind, I hope to make appear to candid minds.

By *the knowledge of the Lord*, in the text, is not to be understood the natural knowledge of God only. It is plain, that the prophet speaks of the age of the Messiah, when more enlarged discoveries should be made to mankind, of the divine perfections and government, than unassisted reason could attain. *The knowledge of the Lord*, therefore, comprehends the principles of christianity, as well as of natural religion. In order to discern the importance of such knowledge, to general happiness, we shall consider man, I. as an individual—II. as a member of society.

I. Considering man as an individual, let us enquire how far the knowledge of true religion is important, first, to his improvement—next, to his consolation.

First, with respect to the improvement of man—the advancement of his nature in what is valuable and useful, the acquisition of such dispositions and habits as fit him for acting his part with propriety on this stage, and prepare him for a higher state of action hereafter——what benefit does he receive, in these respects, from religious knowledge and belief? It is obvious, that all increase of knowledge is improvement to the understanding. The more that its sphere is enlarged, the greater number of objects that are submitted to its view, especially when these objects are of intrinsic excellence, the more must those rational powers, which are the glory of man, be in the course of attaining their proper strength and maturity. But were the knowledge of religion merely speculative, though the speculation must be admitted to be noble, yet less could be said of its importance. We recommend it to mankind, as forming the heart, and directing the life. Those pure and exalted conceptions, which the christian religion has taught us to entertain of the Deity, as the universal Father and

righteous Governor of the universe—the Standard of unspotted perfection—and *the Author of every good and perfect gift*—conducting his whole administration with an eternal regard to order, virtue, and truth—ever favouring the cause, and supporting the interests, of righteous men—and applying, in this direction, the whole might of omnipotence, and the whole council of unerring wisdom, from the beginning to the end of things; such conceptions both kindle devotion, and strengthen virtue. They give fortitude to the mind in the practice of righteousness, and establish the persuasion of its being our highest interest.

All the doctrines peculiar to the gospel are great improvements on what the light of nature had imperfectly suggested. A high dispensation of Providence is made known, particularly suited to the exigencies of man—calculated for recovering him from that corrupted state, into which experience bears witness that he is fallen—and for restoring him to integrity, and favour with his Creator. The method of carrying on this great plan, is such as gives us the most striking views of the importance of righteousness or virtue, and of the high account in which it stands with God. The Son of God appeared on the earth, and suffered as a propitiation for the sins of the world, with this express intention, that he might *bring in everlasting righteousness*; that he might *purge our consciences from dead works, to serve the living God*; that he might *redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*. Such a merciful interposition of the Creator of the world, while it illustriously displays his goodness, and signalizes his concern for the moral interests of mankind, affords us, at the same time, the most satisfying ground of confidence and trust. It offers an object to the mind, on which it can lay hold, for the security of its future hopes; when, with a certainty far beyond what any abstract

argument could yield, it appeals to a distinguished fact; and is enabled to say, *He, that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things*?*

While the divine government is thus placed in a light the most amiable, and most encouraging to every virtuous mind, there is, at the same time, something extremely awful and solemn in the whole doctrine of redemption. It is calculated to strike the mind with reverence for the divine administration. It points at some deep malignity in sin, at some dreadful consequences flowing from guilt, unknown in their causes and in their whole effects to us, which moved the Sovereign of the world to depart from the ordinary course of Providence, and to bring about the restoration of his fallen creatures by a method so astonishing. Mankind are hereby awakened to the most serious reflexions. Such views are opened of the sanctity of the divine laws, of the strictness of the divine justice, of the importance of the part which is assigned them to act, as serve to prevent their trifling with human life, and add dignity and solemnity to virtue. These great purposes are farther carried on, by the discovery which is made of the fixed connexion in which this life stands with a future eternal state. We are represented as *sowing now, what we are to reap hereafter*—undergoing a course of probation and trial, which, according as it terminates in our improvement, or leaves us unreformed and corrupted—will dismiss us to lasting abodes, either of punishment or reward. Such a discovery rises far above the dubious conjectures, and uncertain reasonings, which mere natural light suggests, concerning the future condition of mankind. Here we find, what alone can produce any considerable influence on practice, explicit promise and threatening—an authoritative sanction given to a law—the Governor and Judge

* Rom. viii. 32.

revealed—and all the motives, which can operate on hope and fear, brought home to the heart, with *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts*. In a word, a great, and magnificent plan of divine administration is opened to us, in the gospel of Christ; and nothing is omitted that can impress mankind with the persuasion of their being all, in the strictest sense, subjects of the moral government of God.

Though the bounds of this discourse allow us to take only an imperfect view of the principles of christian doctrine; yet the hints, which have been given, lay a sufficient foundation for appealing to every impartial mind, whether the knowledge and belief of such principles be not intimately connected with the improvement, and, by consequence, with the happiness of man? I reason now with such as admit, that virtue is the great source both of improvement and happiness. Let them lay what stress they please upon the authority of conscience, and upon the force and evidence of its dictates; can they refuse to allow, that the natural tendency of the principles, which I have mentioned, is to support those dictates, and to confirm that authority; to excite, on various occasions, the most useful sentiments; to provide additional restraints from vice, and additional motives to every virtue? Who dares pronounce, that there is no case in which conscience stands in need of such assistance to direct, where there is so much uncertainty and darkness; and to prompt, where there is so much feebleness and irresolution, and such a fatal proneness to vice and folly?

But how good soever the tendency of religious principles may be, some will still call in question their actual significancy, and influence on life. This tendency is by various causes defeated. Between the belief of religious principles and a correspondent practice, it will be alleged, that frequent experience shows there is no necessary connexion; and that therefore the propagation of the one,

cannot give us any assurance of proportionable improvements following in the other.—This, in part, is granted to be true; as we admit that religious knowledge and belief are susceptible of various degrees, before they arrive at that real christian faith, which the scripture represents as *purifying the heart*. But though the connexion between principle and practice be not necessary and invariable, it will not, I suppose, be denied, that there is some connexion. Here then one avenue to the heart is opened. If the tendency of religious knowledge be good, wisdom must direct, and duty oblige us to cultivate it. For tendency will, at least in some cases, rise into effect; and, probably, in more cases than are known and observed by the world. Besides the distinguished examples of true religion and virtue, which have, more or less, adorned every age of the christian era, what numbers may there be, in the more silent and private scenes of life, overlooked by superficial observers of mankind, on whose hearts and lives religious principles have the most happy influence? Even on loose and giddy minds, where they are far from accomplishing their full effect, their influence is, frequently, not altogether lost. Impressions of religion often check vice in its career. They prevent it from proceeding its utmost length: and though they do not entirely reform the offender, they serve to maintain order in society. Persons, who are now bad, might probably have been worse without them, and the world have suffered more from unrestrained licentiousness. They often sow latent seeds of goodness in the heart, which proper circumstances and occasions afterwards ripen; though the reformation of the offender may not be so conspicuous as his former enormities have been. From the native tendency of religious belief, there is reason to conclude, that those good effects of it are not so rare as some would represent them. By its nature and tendency, we can better judge of its effects,

than by observations drawn from a supposed experience, which often is narrow in its compass, and fallacious in its conclusions.

The actual influence of principle and belief on mankind, admits of clear illustration from uncontested matter of fact. They who hold the good effects of christian principles to be so inconsiderable, as to render the propagation of them of small importance, will be at no loss to give us instances of corrupt principles of belief having had the most powerful influence on the world. Loud complaints we hear from this quarter of the direful effects which superstition and enthusiasm have produced—of their having poisoned the tempers, and transformed the manners of men—of their having overcome the strongest restraints of law, of reason, and humanity. Is this then the case, that all principles, except good ones, are of such mighty energy? Strange! that false religion should be able to do so much, and true religion so little—that belief, so powerful in one case, should be so impotent in the other!—No impartial inquirer, surely, can entertain this opinion. The whole history of mankind shows, that their religious tenets and principles, of whatever nature they be, are of great influence in forming their character, and directing their conduct. The mischief which false principles have done, affords a good argument to guard carefully against error: but as it is a proof of what belief can do, it gives ground to hope the more from it, when rightly directed. The same torrent, which, when it is put out of its natural course, overflows and lays waste a country, adorns and enriches it, when running in its proper channel. If it be alleged, that superstition is likely to be more powerful in its effects than truth, because it agrees better with the follies and corruptions of the world; we may oppose to this, on the other hand, that truth has the divine blessing and the countenance of heaven on its side. Let

us always hope well of a cause that is good in itself, and beneficial to mankind. Truth is mighty, and will prevail. Let us spread the *incorruptible seed* as widely as we can, and trust in God that he will give the increase. Having thus shown the importance of religious knowledge to mankind, in the way of improvement, let us,

In the second place, consider it in the light of consolation—as bringing aid and relief to us amidst the distresses of life. Here religion incontestibly triumphs: and its happy effects, in this respect, furnish a strong argument to every benevolent mind, for wishing them to be farther diffused throughout the world. For without the belief and hope afforded by divine revelation, the circumstances of man are extremely forlorn. He finds himself placed here as a stranger in a vast universe, where the powers and operations of nature are very imperfectly known—where both the beginnings and the issues of things are involved in mysterious darkness—where he is unable to discover, with any certainty, whence he sprung, or for what purpose he was brought into this state of existence—whether he be subjected to the government of a mild, or of a wrathful ruler—what construction he is to put on many of the dispensations of his providence; and what his fate is to be, when he departs hence. What a disconsolate situation to a serious, inquiring mind! The greater degree of virtue it possesses, its sensibility is likely to be the more oppressed by this burden of labouring thought. Even though it were in one's power to banish all uneasy thought, and to fill up the hours of life with perpetual amusement, life, so filled up, would, upon reflexion, appear poor and trivial. But these are far from being the terms, upon which man is brought into this world. He is conscious, that his being is frail and feeble: he sees himself beset with various dangers; and is exposed to many a melancholy apprehension, from the evils

which he may have to encounter, before he arrives at the close of life. In this distressed condition, to reveal to him such discoveries of the Supreme Being, as the christian religion affords, is to reveal to him a Father and a Friend; is to let in a ray of the most cheering light upon the darkness of the human estate. He, who was before a destitute orphan, wandering in the inhospitable desert, has now gained a shelter from the bitter and inclement blast. He now knows to whom to pray, and in whom to trust—where to unbosom his sorrows—and from what hand to look for relief.

It is certain, that when the heart bleeds from some wound of recent misfortune, nothing is of equal efficacy with religious comfort. It is of power to enlighten the darkest hour, and to assuage the severest woe, by the belief of divine favour, and the prospect of a blessed immortality. In such hopes the mind expatiates with joy; and when bereaved of its earthly friends, solaces itself with the thoughts of one Friend, who will never forsake it. Refined reasonings, concerning the nature of the human condition, and the improvement which philosophy teaches us to make of every event, may entertain the mind when it is at ease; may perhaps contribute to sooth it when slightly touched with sorrow. But when it is torn with any sore distress, they are cold and feeble, compared with a direct promise from the word of God. This is *an anchor to the soul, both sure and stedfast*. This has given consolation and refuge to many a virtuous heart, at a time when the most cogent reasonings would have proved utterly unavailing.

Upon the approach of death, especially when, if a man thinks at all, his anxiety about his future interests must naturally increase, the power of religious consolation is sensibly felt. Then appears, in the most striking light, the high value of the discoveries made by the gospel—not only life and immor-

tality revealed, but a Mediator with God discovered—mercy proclaimed, through him, to the frailties of the penitent and the humble—and his presence promised to be with them, when they are passing through *the valley of the shadow of death*, in order to bring them safe into unseen habitations of rest and joy. Here is ground for their leaving the world with comfort and peace. But in this severe and trying period, this labouring hour of nature, how shall the unhappy man support himself, who knows not, or believes not, the discoveries of religion? Secretly conscious to himself, that he has not acted his part as he ought to have done, the sins of his past life arise before him in sad remembrance. He wishes to exist after death, and yet dreads that existence. The Governor of the world is unknown. He cannot tell whether every endeavour to obtain his mercy may not be vain. All is awful obscurity around him: and in the midst of endless doubts and perplexities, the trembling, reluctant soul is forced away from the body. As the misfortunes of life must, to such a man, have been most oppressive; so its end is bitter. His sun sets in a dark cloud: and the night of death closes over his head, full of misery.—Having now shown how important *the knowledge of the Lord* is, both to the improvement and the consolation of man, considered as an individual, I am next to show,

II. How important this knowledge is to him, as a member of society. This branch of the subject is, in part, anticipated by what has been said. For all the improvement which man receives as an individual, redounds to the benefit of the public. Society reaps the fruit of the virtues of all the members who compose it: and in proportion as each, apart, is made better, the whole must flourish.

But besides this effect, religious knowledge has a direct tendency to improve the social intercourse of men, and to assist them in co-operating for common good. It is the great instrument of civilizing the

multitude, and forming them to union. It tames the fierceness of their passions, and softens the rudeness of their manners. There is much reason to doubt, whether any regular society ever subsisted, or could subsist, in the world, destitute of all religious ideas and principles. They who, in early times, attempted to bring the wandering and scattered tribes of men from the woods, and to unite them in cities and communities, always found it necessary to begin with some institution of religion. The wisest legislators of old, through the whole progress of their systems of government, considered religion as essential to civil polity. If even those imperfect forms of it, loaded with so much superstition and error, were important to the welfare of society, how much more that reasonable worship of the true God, which is taught by the gospel? True religion introduces the idea of regular subjection, by accustoming mankind to the awe of superior power in the Deity, joined with the veneration of superior wisdom and goodness. It is by its nature an associating principle; and creates new and sacred bonds of union among men. Common assemblies for religious worship, and joint homage offered up to one God—the sense of being all dependent on the same protection, and bound to duty by the same ties, sharers in the same benefits of heaven, and expectants of the same reward—tend to awaken the sentiments of friendly relation, and to confirm and strengthen our mutual connexion. The doctrine of christianity is most adverse to all tyranny and oppression, but highly favourable to the interests of good government among men. It represses the spirit of licentiousness and sedition. It inculcates the duty of subordination to lawful superiors. It requires us, *to fear God, to honour the king, and not to meddle with them that are given to change.*

Religious knowledge forwards all useful and ornamental improvements in society. Experience shows,

that, in proportion as it diffuses its light, learning flourishes, and liberal arts are cultivated and advanced. Just conceptions of religion promote a free and manly spirit. They lead men to think for themselves; to form their principles upon fair enquiry; and not to resign their conscience to the dictates of men. Hence they naturally inspire aversion to slavery of every kind; and promote a taste for liberty and laws. Despotic governments have generally taken the firmest root among nations that were blinded by Mahometan or Pagan darkness; where the throne of violence has been supported by ignorance and false religion. In the christian world, during those centuries in which gross superstition held its reign undisturbed, oppression and slavery were in its train. The cloud of ignorance sat thick and deep over the nations; and the world was threatened with a relapse into ancient barbarity. As soon as the true *knowledge of the Lord* revived, at the auspicious era of the reformation, learning, liberty, and arts, began to shine forth with it, and to resume their lustre.

But the happy influence which religion exerts on society, extends much farther than to effects of this kind. It is not only subsidiary to the improvement, but necessary to the preservation, of society. It is the very basis on which it rests. Religious principle is what gives men the surest hold of one another. That last and greatest pledge of veracity, an oath, without which no society could subsist, derives its whole authority from an established reverence of God, to whom it is a solemn appeal. Banish religious principle, and you loosen all the bonds which connect mankind together; you shake the fundamental pillar of mutual confidence and trust; you render the security arising from laws, in a great measure, void and ineffectual. For human laws, and human sanctions, cannot extend to numberless cases, in which the safety of mankind is deeply concerned.

They would prove very feeble instruments of order and peace, if there were no checks upon the conduct of men, from the sense of divine legislation— if no belief of future rewards and punishments were to overawe conscience, and to supply the defects of human government.

Indeed, the belief of religion is of such importance to public welfare, that the most expressive description we could give, of a society of men in the utmost disorder, would be to say, that there was no fear of God left among them. Imagination would immediately conceive of them as abandoned to rapine and violence, to perfidy and treachery; as deceiving and deceived, oppressing and oppressed; consumed by intestine broils, and ripe for becoming a prey to the first invader. On the other hand, in order to form the idea of a society flourishing in its highest glory, we need only conceive the belief of christian principles exerting its full influence on the hearts and lives of all the members. Instantly, the most amiable scene would open to our view. We should see the causes of public disunion removed, when men were animated with that noble spirit of love and charity which our religion breathes; and formed to the pursuit of those higher interests, which give no occasion to competition and jealousy. We should see families, neighbourhoods, and communities, living in unbroken amity, and pursuing, with one heart and mind, the common interest—sobriety of manners, and simplicity of life, restored—virtuous industry, carrying on its useful labours—and cheerful contentment every where reigning. Politicians may lay down what plans they please for advancing public prosperity: but, in truth, it is the prevalency of such principles of religion and virtue, which forms the strength and glory of a nation. When these are totally wanting, no measures, contrived by human wisdom, can supply the defect. In proportion as they prevail, they raise the state of

society from that sad degeneracy into which it is at present sunk; and carry it forward under the blessing of heaven, towards that happy period, when *nation shall not lift up their sword against nation, nor learn war any more.*

In order to prove the importance of religious knowledge to the interest of society, one consideration more, deserving particular attention, remains to be mentioned. It is, that if *good seed* be not sown in the field, *tares* will infallibly spring up. The propension towards religion is strong in the human heart. There is a natural preparation in our minds, for receiving some impressions of supernatural belief. Upon these, among ignorant and uncultivated men, superstition or enthusiasm never fail to graft themselves. Into what monstrous forms these have shot forth, and what various mischiefs they have produced to society, is too well known. Nor is this the whole of the danger. Designing men are always ready to take advantage of this popular weakness, and to direct the superstitious bias of the multitude to their own ambitious and interested ends. Superstition, in itself a formidable evil, threatens consequences still more formidable, when it is rendered the tool of design and craft. Hence arises one of the most powerful arguments for propagating with zeal, as far as our influence can extend, the pure and undefiled doctrines of the gospel of Christ; in order that just and rational principles of religion may fill up that room, in the minds of men, which dangerous fanaticism will otherwise usurp.

This consideration alone is sufficient to show the high utility of the design undertaken by the society for propagating christian knowledge. With great propriety, they have bestowed their chief attention on a remote quarter of our own country, where, from a variety of causes, ignorance and superstition had gained more ground, than in any other corner of the land—where the inhabitants, by their local situati-

on, were more imperfectly supplied with the means of proper education and instruction—and at the same time exposed to the seductions of such as sought to pervert them from the truth. The laudable endeavours of this society, in diffusing religious and useful knowledge through this part of the country, have already been crowned with much success: and more is still to be expected from the continuance of their pious and well-directed attention.

With such good designs, it becomes all to co-operate, who are lovers of mankind. Thus shall they show their just sense of the value of that blessing which they enjoy, in the knowledge of the gospel of Christ; and their gratitude to heaven for conferring it upon them. Thus shall they make the blessings of those who are now ready to *perish through lack of knowledge*, descend upon their heads. Thus shall they contribute their endeavours for bringing forward that happy period foretold by ancient prophecy; when *there shall be one Lord over all the earth, and his name one*; when that name shall be great from the rising to the setting sun; when *there shall be nothing to hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of God*; but judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field; the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose; and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*.

* Zechar. xiv. 9. Malachi, i. 11. Isaiah, xxxii. 16. xxxv. 3.

S E R M O N XXXI.

On the TRUE HONOUR of MAN.

PROVERBS, iv. 8.

Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour. —

THE love of honour is one of the strongest passions in the human heart. It shows itself in our earliest years; and is coeval with the first exertions of reason. It accompanies us through all the stages of subsequent life, and in private stations discovers itself no less than in the higher ranks of society. In their ideas of what constitutes honour, men greatly vary, and often grossly err. But of somewhat, which they conceive to form pre-eminence and distinction, all are desirous. All wish, by some means or other, to acquire respect from those among whom they live; and to contempt and disgrace, none are insensible.

Among the advantages which attend religion and virtue, the honour which they confer on man is frequently mentioned in scripture as one of the most considerable. *Wisdom is the principal thing, says Solomon in the passage where the text lies; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. — She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.* It is evident that throughout all the sacred writings, and particularly in this book of proverbs, by *wisdom* is to be understood a principle of religion producing virtuous conduct. *The fear of the Lord, is said to be the beginning of wisdom: and by this fear of the Lord men are said to depart from evil—to walk in the way of good men, and to keep the*

path of the righteous *. Man is then regulated by the *wisdom which is from above*, when he is formed by piety to the duties of virtue and morality; and of the wisdom which produces this effect, it is asserted in the text, that it *bringeth to us honour*.

On this recommendation of religion it is the more necessary to fix our attention, because it is often refused to it by men of the world. Their notions of honour are apt to run in a very different channel. Wherever religion is mentioned, they connect with it ideas of melancholy and dejection, or of mean and feeble spirits. They perhaps admit that it may be useful to the multitude, as a principle of restraint from disorders and crimes; and that to persons of a peculiar turn of mind, it may afford consolation under the distresses of life. But from the active scenes of the world, and from those vigorous exertions which display to advantage the human abilities, they incline totally to exclude it. It may sooth the timid or the sad: but they consider it as having no connexion with what is proper to raise men to honour and distinction. I shall now endeavour to remove this reproach from religion; and to show that in every situation of human life, even in the highest stations, it forms the honour, as well as the happiness of man.

But first, let us be careful to ascertain what true religion is. I admit that there is a certain species of religion (if we can give it that name) which has no claim to such high distinction—when it is placed wholly in speculation and belief, in the regularity of external homage, or in fiery zeal about contested opinions. From a superstition inherent in the human mind, the religion of the multitude has always been tinged with too much of this spirit. They serve God as they would serve a proud master, who may be flattered by their prostrations, appeased by their gifts, and gained by loud protestations of at-

* *Prov. ii. 20.*

tachment to his interests, and of enmity to all whom they suppose to be his foes. But this is not that *wisdom*, to which Solomon ascribes, in the text, such high prerogatives. It is not the religion which we preach, nor the religion of Christ. That religion consists in the love of God and the love of man, grounded on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Redeemer of the world, the Intercessor for the penitent, and the Patron of the virtuous; through whom we enjoy comfortable access to the Sovereign of the universe, in the acts of worship and devotion. It consists in justice, humanity, and mercy—in a fair and candid mind, a generous and affectionate heart—accompanied with temperance, self-government, and a perpetual regard in all our actions to conscience, and to the law of God. A religious, and a thoroughly virtuous character, therefore, I consider as the same.

By the true honour of man is to be understood, not what merely commands external respect, but what commands the respect of the heart; what raises one to acknowledged eminence above others of the same species; what always creates esteem, and in its highest degree produces veneration. The question now before us is, from what cause this eminence arises? By what means is it to be attained?

I say, first, from riches it does not arise. These, we all know, may belong to the vilest of mankind. Providence has scattered them among the crowd with an undistinguishing hand, as of purpose to show of what small account they are in the sight of God. Experience every day proves that the possession of them is consistent with the most general contempt. On this point, therefore, I conceive it not necessary to insist any longer.

Neither does the honour of man arise from mere dignity of rank or office. Were such distinctions always, or even generally, obtained in consequence of uncommon merit, they would indeed confer honour on the character. But, in the present state of

society, it is too well known that this is not the case. They are often the consequence of birth alone. They are sometimes the fruit of mere dependence and assiduity. They may be the recompence of flattery, versatility, and intrigue; and so be conjoined with meanness and baseness of character. To persons graced with noble birth, or placed in high stations, much external honour is due. This is what the subordination of society necessarily requires—and what every good member of it will cheerfully yield. But how often has it happened, that such persons, when externally respected, are, nevertheless, despised by men in their hearts; nay, sometimes execrated by the public? Their elevation, if they have been unworthy of it, is so far from procuring them true honour, that it only renders their insignificance, perhaps their infamy, more conspicuous. By drawing attention to their conduct, it discovers, in the most glaring light, how little they deserved the station which they possess.

I must next observe, that the proper honour of man arises not from some of those splendid actions and abilities which excite high admiration. Courage and prowess, military renown, signal victories and conquests, may render the name of a man famous, without rendering his character truly honourable. To many brave men, to many heroes renowned in story, we look up with wonder. Their exploits are recorded. Their praises are sung. They stand as on an eminence above the rest of mankind. Their eminence, nevertheless, may not be of that sort before which we bow with inward esteem and respect. Something more is wanted for that purpose than the conquering arm and the intrepid mind. The laurels of the warrior must at all times be dyed in blood, and bedewed with the tears of the widow and the orphan. But if they have been stained by rapine and inhumanity—if sordid avarice has marked his character—or low and gross sensuality has degraded

his life—the great hero sinks into a little man.—What at a distance, or on a superficial view we admired, becomes mean, perhaps odious; when we examine it more closely. It is like the colossal statue, whose immense size struck the spectator afar off with astonishment; but when nearly viewed, it appears disproportioned, unshapely and rude.

Observations of the same kind may be applied to all the reputation derived from civil accomplishments; from the refined politics of the statesman; or the literary efforts of genius and erudition. These bestow, and, within certain bounds, ought to bestow, eminence and distinction on men. They discover talents which in themselves are shining; and which become highly valuable, when employed in advancing the good of mankind. Hence they frequently give rise to fame. But a distinction is to be made between fame and true honour. The former is a loud and noisy applause; the latter, a more silent and internal homage. Fame floats on the breath of the multitude: honour rests on the judgment of the thinking. Fame may give praise, while it withholds esteem: true honour implies esteem mingled with respect. The one regards particular distinguished talents: the other looks up to the whole character. Hence the statesman, the orator, or the poet, may be famous; while yet the man himself is far from being honoured. We envy his abilities. We wish to rival them. But we would not choose to be classed with him who possessed them. Instances of this sort are too often found in every record of ancient or modern history.

From all this it follows, that in order to discern where man's true honor lies, we must look, not to any adventitious circumstance of fortune; not to any single sparkling quality; but to the whole of what forms a man; what intitles him, as such, to rank high among that class of beings to which he belongs; in a word, we must look to the mind and

the soul.—A mind superior to fear, to selfish interest and corruption; a mind governed by the principles of uniform rectitude and integrity; the same in prosperity and adversity; which no bribe can seduce, nor terror overawe; neither by pleasure melted into effeminacy, nor by distress sunk into dejection; such is the mind which forms the distinction and eminence of man.—One, who in no situation of life is either ashamed or afraid of discharging his duty, and acting his proper part with firmness and constancy; true to the God whom he worships, and true to the faith in which he professes to believe; full of affection to his brethren of mankind; faithful to his friends, generous to his enemies, warm with compassion to the unfortunate; self-denying to little private interests and pleasures, but zealous for public interest and happiness; magnanimous, without being proud; humble, without being mean; just, without being harsh; simple in his manners, but manly in his feeling; on whose word you can entirely rely; whose countenance never deceives you; whose professions of kindness are the effusions of his heart: one, in fine, whom independent of any views of advantage, you would choose for a superior, could trust in as a friend, and could love as a brother;—This is the man, whom in your heart, above all others, you do, you must, honour.

Such a character, imperfectly as it has now been drawn, all must acknowledge to be formed solely by the influence of steady religion and virtue. It is the effect of principles which, operating on conscience, determine him uniformly to pursue *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise* *. By these means *wisdom, as the text asserts, bringeth us to honour.*

Philip, iv. 8.

In confirmation of this doctrine, it is to be observed, that the honour which man acquires by religion and virtue is more independent and more complete, than what can be acquired by any other means. It is independent of anything foreign or external. It is not partial, but entire respect, which it procures. Wherever fortune is concerned, it is the station or rank which commands our deference. Where some shining quality attracts admiration, it is only to a part of the character that we pay homage. But when a person is distinguished for eminent worth and goodness, it is the man, the whole man whom we respect. The honour which he possesses is intrinsic. Place him in any situation of life, even an obscure one—let room only be given for his virtues to come forth, and show themselves—and you will revere him, as a private citizen, or as the father of a family. If in higher life he appear more illustrious, this is not owing merely to the respect created by rank. It is, because there a nobler sphere of action is opened to him—because his virtues are brought forth into more extended exertion, and placed in such conspicuous view, that he appears to grace and adorn the station which he fills. Even in the silence of retirement, or in the retreat of old age, such a man sinks not into forgotten obscurity. His remembered virtues continue to be honoured, when their active exertions are over; and to the last stage of life, he is followed by public esteem and respect. Whereas, if genuine worth be wanting, the applause, which may have attended a man for a while, by degrees dies away. Though, for a part of his life, he had dazzled the world, this was owing to his deficiency in the essential qualities having not been suspected. As soon as the imposture is discovered, the falling star sinks in darkness.—There is therefore a standard of independent, intrinsic worth, to which we must bring in the end whatever claims to be honourable among men. By this we must measure it; and

it will always be found, that nothing but what is essential to man, has power to command the respect of man's heart.

It is to be farther observed, that the universal consent of mankind in honouring real virtue, is sufficient to show that the genuine sense of human nature is on this subject. All other claims of honour are ambulatory and changeable. The degrees of respect paid to external stations vary with forms of government, and fashions of the times. Qualities, which in one country are highly honoured, in another are lightly esteemed. Nay, what in some regions of the earth distinguishes a man above others, might elsewhere expose him to contempt or ridicule. But where was ever the nation on the face of the globe, who did not honour unblemished worth, unaffected piety, steadfast, humane, and regular virtue? To whom were altars erected in the heathen world, but to those who by their merits and heroic labours, by their invention of useful arts, or by some signal acts of beneficence to their country, or to mankind, were found worthy, in their opinion, to be transferred from among men, and added to the number of the gods? Even the counterfeited appearances of virtue, which are so often found in the world, are testimonies to its praise. The hypocrite knows that, without assuming the garb of virtue, every other advantage he can possess, is insufficient to procure him esteem. Interference of interest, or perversity of disposition, may occasionally lead individuals to oppose, and even to hate, the upright and the good. But however the characters of such persons may be mistaken, or misrepresented, yet, as far as they are acknowledged to be virtuous, the profligate dare not traduce them. Genuine virtue has a language that speaks to every heart throughout the world. It is a language which is understood by all. In every region, every clime, the homage paid to it is the

fame. In no one sentiment were ever mankind more generally agreed.

Finally, the honour acquired by religion and virtue is honour divine and immortal. It is honour, not in the estimation of men only, but in the sight of God; whose judgment is the standard of truth and right; whose approbation confers a *crown of glory that fadeth not away*. All the honour we can gain among men is limited and confined. Its circle is narrow. Its duration is short and transitory. But the honour which is founded on true goodness, accompanies us through the whole progress of our existence. It enters with man into a future state; and continues to brighten throughout eternal ages. What procured him respect on earth, shall render him estimable among the great assembly of angels, and *spirits of just men made perfect*; where, we are assured, they who have been eminent in righteousness shall *shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever* *. Earthly honours are both short-lived in their continuance, and, while they last, tarnished with spots and stains. On some quarter or other, their brightness is obscured; their exaltation is humbled. But the honour which proceeds from God, and virtue, is unmixed and pure. It is a lustre which is derived from heaven; and is likened, in scripture, to *the light of the morning, when the sun riseth; even a morning without clouds; to the light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day* †. Whereas the honours, which the world confers, resemble the feeble and twinkling flame of a taper; which is often clouded by the smoke it sends forth; is always wasting; and soon dies totally away.

Let him, therefore, who retains any sense of human dignity—who feels within him that desire of honour which is congenial to man, aspire to the gratification of this passion by methods which are worthy of his nature. Let him not rest on any of those

* Daniel xii. 3.

† 2 Sam. xxiii. 4. Prov. iv. 18.

external distinctions which vanity has contrived to introduce. These can procure him no more than the semblance of respect. Let him not be flattered by the applause which some occasional display of abilities may have gained him. That applause may be mingled with contempt. Let him look to what will dignify his character as a man. Let him cultivate those moral qualities which all men in their hearts respect. *Wisdom shall then give to his head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to him.* This is an honor to which all may aspire. It is a prize, for which every one, whether of high or low rank, may contend. It is always in his power so to distinguish himself by worthy and virtuous conduct, as to command the respect of those around him; and, what is highest of all, to obtain praise and honour from God.

Let no one imagine, that in the religious part of this character, there is any thing which casts over it a gloomy shade, or derogates from that esteem which men are generally disposed to yield to exemplary virtues. False ideas may be entertained of religion; as false and imperfect conceptions of virtue have often prevailed in the world. But to true religion there belongs no sullen gloom—no melancholy austerity, tending to withdraw men from human society, or to diminish the exertions of active virtue. On the contrary, the religious principle, rightly understood, not only unites with all such virtues, but supports, fortifies, and confirms them. It is so far from obscuring the lustre of a character, that it heightens and ennobles it. It adds to all the moral virtues, a venerable and authoritative dignity. It renders the virtuous character more august. To the decorations of a palace, it joins the majesty of a temple.

He, who divides religion from virtue, understands neither the one nor the other. It is the union of the two, which consummates the human cha-

rafter and state. It is this union which has distinguished those great and illustrious men, who have shone with so much honour in former ages; and whose memory lives in the remembrance of succeeding generations. It is their union which forms that *wisdom which is from above*—and to which the text ascribes such high effects—and to which belongs the sublime encomium given of it by an author of one of the apocryphal books of scripture; with whose beautiful and emphatical expressions I conclude this discourse. *The memorial of virtue is immortal. It is known with God, and with men. When it is present, men take example at it; and when it is gone, they desire it. It weareth a crown, and triumpheth for ever, having gotten the victory, striving for undefiled rewards. Wisdom is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty. Therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. She is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness. Remaining in herself, she maketh all things new; and in all ages, entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God, and prophets: for God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom. She is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of the stars. Being compared with light, she is found before it*.*

S E R M O N XXXII.

On SENSIBILITY.

ROMANS, xii. 15.

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

THE amiable spirit of our holy religion appears in nothing more than in the care it hath taken to enforce on men the social duties of life. This

* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 2, 3.—vii. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.

is one of the clearest characteristics of its being a religion whose origin is divine: for every doctrine, which proceeds from the Father of mercies, will undoubtedly breathe benevolence and humanity. This is the scope of the two exhortations in the text, *to rejoice with them rejoice, and to weep with them that weep*; the one calculated to promote the happiness—the other, to alleviate the sorrows of our fellow creatures; both concurring to form that temper, which interests us in the concerns of our brethren; which disposes us to feel along with them, to take part in their joys, and in their sorrows. This temper is known by the name of sensibility—a word, which in modern times we hear in the mouth of every one—a quality, which every one affects to possess—in itself, a most amiable and worthy disposition of mind—but often mistaken and abused—employed as a cover, sometimes, to capricious humour—sometimes, to selfish passions. I shall endeavour to explain the nature of true sensibility. I shall consider its effects: and, after showing its advantages, shall point out the abuses, and mistaken forms of this virtue.

The original constitution of our nature, with respect to the mixture of selfish and social affections, discovers in this, as in every other part of our frame, profound and admirable wisdom. Each individual is, by his Creator, committed particularly to himself, and his own care. He has it more in his own power to promote his own welfare, than any other person can possibly have to promote it. It was therefore fit, it was necessary, that, in each individual, self-love should be the strongest and most active instinct. This self-love, if he had been a being who stood solitary, might have proved sufficient for the purpose, both of his preservation, and his welfare. But such is not the situation of man. He is mixed among multitudes of the same nature. In these multitudes, the self-love of one man, or attention to his parti-

cular interest, encountering the self-love and the interests of another, could not but produce frequent opposition, and innumerable mischiefs. It was necessary, therefore, to provide a counterbalance to this part of his nature; which is accordingly done, by implanting in him those social and benevolent instincts which lead him, in some measure out of himself, to follow the interest of others. The strength of these social instincts is, in general proportioned to their importance in human life. Hence that degree of sensibility, which prompts us to *weep with them that weep*, is stronger than that which prompts us to *rejoice with them that rejoice*; for this reason, that the unhappy stand more in need of our fellow-feeling and assistance than the prosperous. Still, however, it was requisite, that in each individual the quantity of self-love should remain in a large proportion, on account of its importance to the preservation of his life and well-being. But as the quantity requisite for this purpose is apt both to engross his attention, and to carry him into criminal excesses, the perfection of his nature is measured by the due counterpoise of those social principles, which, tempering the force of the selfish affection, render man equally useful to himself, and to those with whom he is joined in society. Hence the use and the value of that sensibility of which now treat.

That it constitutes an essential part of a religious character, there can be no doubt. Not only are the words of the text express to this purpose, but the whole new testament abounds with passages which enjoin the cultivation of this disposition. Being *all one body, and members one of another*, we are commanded to *love our neighbour as ourself; to look every man not on his own things only, but on those of others also; to be pitiful, to be courteous, to be tender-hearted; to bear one another's burdens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ**.

* Luke x. 27. Philip ii. 4. 1 Peter iii. 8. Ephes. iv. 23. Galat. vi. 2.

The dispositions opposite to sensibility are, cruelty, hardness of heart, contracted attachment to worldly interests; which every one will admit to be directly opposite to the christian character. According to the different degrees of constitutional warmth in men's affections, sensibility may, even among the virtuous, prevail in different proportions. For all derive not from nature the same happy delicacy, and tenderness of feeling. With some, the heart melts, and relents, in kind emotions, much more easily than with others. But with every one, who aspires to the character of a good man, it is necessary that the humane and compassionate dispositions should be found. There must be that within him, which shall form him to feel in some degree with the heart of a brother; and when he beholds others enjoying happiness, or sees them sunk in sorrow, shall bring his affections to accord, and, if we may speak so, to sound a note unison to theirs. This is to *rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep*. How much this temper belongs to the perfection of our nature, we learn from one who exhibited that perfection in its highest degree. When our Lord Jesus, on a certain occasion, came to the grave of a beloved friend, and saw his relations mourning around it, he presently caught the impression of their sorrow; *he groaned in spirit, and was troubled*. He knew that he was about to remove the cause of their distress, by recalling Lazarus to life: yet in the moment of grief, his heart sympathised with theirs; and, together with the weeping friends, *Jesus wept* *.

Let us next proceed to consider the effect of this virtuous sensibility on our character, and our state. I shall consider it in two views—its influence on our moral conduct, and its influence on our happiness.

First, it powerfully influences the proper discharge of all the relative and social duties of life.

* John iv 35.

Without some discharge of these duties, there could be no comfort or security in human society. Men would become hordes of savages, perpetually harassing one another. In one way or other, therefore, the great duties of social life must be performed. There must be among mankind some reciprocal co-operation and aid. In this, all consent. But let us observe, that these duties may be performed from different principles, and in different ways. Sometimes they are performed merely from decency and regard to character—sometimes from fear, and even from selfishness, which obliges men to show kindness, in order that they may receive returns of it. In such cases, the exterior of fair behaviour may be preserved. But all will admit, that when from constraint only, the offices of seeming kindness are performed, little dependence can be placed on them, and little value allowed to them.

By others, these offices are discharged solely from a principle of duty. They are men of cold affections, and perhaps of an interested character. But, overawed by a sense of religion, and convinced that they are bound to be beneficent, they fulfil the course of relative duties with regular tenor. Such men act from conscience and principle. So far they do well, and are worthy of praise. They assist their friends; they give to the poor; they do justice to all. But what a different complexion is given to the same actions, how much higher flavour do they acquire, when they flow from the sensibility of a feeling heart? If one be not moved by affection, even supposing him influenced by principle, he will go no farther than strict principle appears to require. He will advance slowly and reluctantly. As it is justice, not generosity, which impels him, he will often feel as a task, what he is required by conscience to perform. Whereas, to him who is prompted by virtuous sensibility, every office of beneficence

and humanity is a pleasure. He gives, assists, and relieves, not merely because he is bound to do so, but because it would be painful for him to refrain. Hence, the smallest benefit he confers, rises in its value, on account of its carrying the affection of the giver impressed upon the gift. It speaks his heart; and the discovery of the heart is very frequently of greater consequence than all that liberality can bestow. How often will the affectionate smile of approbation gladden the humble, and raise the dejected? How often will the look of tender sympathy, or the tear that involuntarily falls, impart consolation to the unhappy? By means of this correspondence of hearts, all the great duties, which we owe to one another, are both performed to more advantage, and endeared in the performance. From true sensibility flow a thousand good offices, apparently small in themselves, but of high importance to the felicity of others; offices which altogether escape the observation of the cold and unfeeling, who, by the hardness of their manner, render themselves unamiable, even when they mean to do good. How happy then would it be for mankind, if this affectionate disposition prevailed more generally in the world! How much would the sum of public virtue and public felicity be increased, if men were always inclined to *rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep!*

But, besides the effect of such a temper on general virtue and happiness, let us consider its effect on the happiness of him who possesses it, and the various pleasures to which it gives him access. If he be master of riches or influence, it affords him the means of increasing his own enjoyment, by relieving the wants, or increasing the comforts of others. If he command not these advantages, yet all the comforts, which he sees in the possession of the deserving, become in some sort his, by his re-

joicing in the good which they enjoy. Even the face of nature yields a satisfaction to him, which the insensible can never know. The profusion of goodness which he beholds poured forth on the universe, dilates his heart with the thought that innumerable multitudes around him are blest and happy.—When he sees the labours of men appearing to prosper, and views a country flourishing in wealth and industry; when he beholds the spring coming forth in its beauty, and reviving the decayed face of nature; or in autumn beholds the fields loaded with plenty, and the year crowned with all its fruits; he lifts his affections with gratitude to the great Father of all, and rejoices in the general felicity and joy.

It may indeed be objected, that the same sensibility lays open the heart to be pierced with many wounds from the distresses which abound in the world; exposes us to frequent suffering from the participation which it communicates of the sorrows, as well as of the joys of friendship. But let it be considered, that the tender melancholy of sympathy is accompanied with a sensation, which they who feel it, would not exchange for the gratifications of the selfish. When the heart is strongly moved by any of the kind affections, even when it pours itself forth in virtuous sorrow, a secret attractive charm mingles with the painful emotion; there is a joy in the midst of grief. Let it be farther considered, that the griefs, which sensibility introduces are counterbalanced by pleasures which flow from the same source. Sensibility heightens in general the human powers, and is connected with acuteness in all our feelings. If it make us more alive to some painful sensations, in return, it renders the pleasing ones, more vivid and animated. The selfish man languishes in his narrow circle of pleasures. They are confined to what affects his own interest. He is obliged to repeat the same gratifications, till they become insipid. But the man of virtuous sensibility

ty moves in a wider sphere of felicity. His powers are much more frequently called forth into occupations of pleasing activity. Numberless occasions open to him, of indulging his favourite taste, by conveying satisfaction to others. Often it is in his power in one way or other, to sooth the afflicted heart—to carry some consolation into the house of woe. In the scenes of ordinary life, in the domestic and social intercourses of man, the cordiality of his affections cheers and gladdens him. Every appearance, every description of innocent happiness, is enjoyed by him. Every native expression of kindness and affection among others is felt by him, even though he be not the object of it. Among a circle of friends, enjoying one another, he is as happy as the happiest. In a word, he lives in a different sort of world from what the selfish man inhabits. He possesses a new sense, which enables him to behold objects, which the selfish cannot see. At the same time, his enjoyments are not of that kind, which remain merely on the surface of the mind. They penetrate the heart. They enlarge and elevate, they refine and ennoble it. To all the pleasing emotions of affection, they add the dignified consciousness of virtue. Children of men! men formed by nature to live and to feel as brethren! how long will ye continue to estrange yourselves from one another by competitions and jealousies, when in cordial union ye might be so much more blessed? How long will ye seek your happiness in selfish gratifications alone, neglecting those purer and better sources of joy, which flow from the affections and the heart?

Having now explained the nature, and shown the value and high advantages, of true sensibility, I proceed to point out some of the mistaken forms, and abuses of this virtue. In modern times, the chief improvement, of which we have to boast, is a sense of humanity. This, notwithstanding the selfishness that still prevails, is the favourite and dis-

tinguishing virtue of the age. On general manners, and on several departments of society, it has had considerable influence. It has abated the spirit of persecution: it has even tempered the horrors of war; and man is now more ashamed, than he was in some former ages, of acting as a savage to man. Hence, sensibility has become so reputable a quality, that the appearance of it is frequently assumed, when the reality is wanting. Softness of manners must not be mistaken for true sensibility. Sensibility indeed tends to produce gentleness in behaviour; and when such behaviour flows from native affection, it is valuable and amiable. But the exterior manner alone may be learned in the school of the world; and often, too often, is found to cover much unfeeling hardness of heart. Professions of sensibility, on every trifling occasion, joined with the appearance of excessive softness, and a profusion of sentimental language; afford always much ground for distrust. They create the suspicion of a studied character. Frequently, under a negligent and seemingly rough manner, there lies a tender and feeling heart. Manliness and sensibility are so far from being incompatible, that the truly brave are, for the most part, generous and humane; while the soft and effeminate are hardly capable of any vigorous exertion of affection.

As sensibility supposes delicacy of feeling with respect to others, they who affect the highest sensibility are apt to carry this delicacy to excess. They are, perhaps not incapable of the warmth of disinterested friendship; but they are become so refined in all their sensations; they entertain such high notions of what ought to correspond in the feelings of others to their own; they are so mightily hurt by every thing which comes not up to their ideal standard of reciprocal affection, as to produce disquiet and uneasiness to all with whom they are connected. Hence, unjust suspicions of their friends; hence, groundless

upbraidings, and complaints of unkindness; hence, a proneness to take violent offence at trifles. In consequence of examining their friends with a microscopic eye, what to an ordinary observer would not be unpleasing, to them is grating and disgusting. At the bottom of the character of such persons there always lie much pride, and attention to themselves. This is indeed a false species of sensibility. It is the substitution of a capricious and irritable, delicacy, in the room of that plain and native tenderness of heart, which prompts men to view others with indulgent eye, and to make great allowances for the imperfections which are sometimes adherent to the most amiable qualities.

There are others who affect not sensibility to this extreme, but who found high claims to themselves upon the degree of interest which they take in the concerns of others. Although their sensibility can produce no benefit to the person who is its object, they always conceive that it intitles themselves to some profitable returns. These, often, are persons of refined and artful character; who partly deceive themselves, and partly employ their sensibility as a cover to interest. He who acts from genuine affection, when he is feeling along with others in their joys or sorrows, thinks not of any recompence to which this gives him a title. He follows the impulse of his heart. He obeys the dictate of his nature; just as the vine by its nature produces fruit, and the fountain pours forth its streams. Wherever views of interest, and prospects of return, mingle with the feelings of affection, sensibility acts an imperfect part, and intitles us to small share of praise.

But supposing it to be both complete and pure, I must caution you against resting the whole merit of your character on sensibility alone. It is indeed a happy constitution of mind. It fits men for the proper discharge of many duties, and gives them access to many virtuous pleasures. It is requisite for our

acceptance either with God or man. At the same time, if it remain an instinctive feeling alone, it will form no more than an imperfect character. Complete virtue is of a more exalted and dignified nature. It supposes sensibility, good temper, and benevolent affections; it includes them as essential parts; but it reaches farther: it supposes them to be strengthened and confirmed by principle; it requires them to be supported by justice, temperance, fortitude, and all those other virtues which enable us to act with propriety, in the trying situations of life.

It is very possible for a man to possess the kind affections in a high degree, while, at the same time, he is carried away by passion and pleasure into many criminal deeds. Almost every man values himself on possessing virtue in one or other of its forms. He wishes to lay claim to some quality which will render him estimable in his own eye, as well as in that of the public. Hence, it is common for many, especially for those in the higher classes of life, to take much praise to themselves on account of their sensibility, though it be, in truth, a sensibility, of a very defective kind. They relent at the view of misery, when it is strongly set before them. Often too, affected chiefly by the powers of description, it is at feigned and pictured distress, more than at real misery, that they relent. The tears, which they shed upon these occasions, they consider as undoubted proofs of virtue. They applaud themselves for the goodness of their hearts; and conclude, that with such feelings they cannot fail to be agreeable to heaven. At the same time these transient relentings make slight impression on their conduct. They give rise to few, if any, good deeds: and soon after such persons have wept at some tragical tale, they are ready to stretch forth the hand of oppression, to grasp at the gain of injustice, or to plunge into the torrent of criminal pleasures. This

sort of sensibility affords no more than a fallacious claim to virtue, and gives men no ground to think highly of themselves. We must enquire not merely how they feel, but how their feelings prompt them to act, in order to ascertain their real character.

I shall conclude with observing, that sensibility, when genuine and pure, has a strong connexion with piety. That warmth of affection, and tenderness of heart, which lead men to feel for their brethren, and to enter into their joys and sorrows, should naturally dispose them to melt at the remembrance of the divine goodness; to glow with admiration of the divine majesty; to send up the voice of praise and adoration to that Supreme Being, who makes his creatures happy. He, who pretends to great sensibility towards men, and yet has no feeling for the high objects of religion, no heart to admire and adore the great Father of the universe, has reason to distrust the truth and delicacy of his sensibility. He has reason to suspect, that in some corner of his heart there lodges a secret depravity, an unnatural hardness and callousness, which vitiates his character. Let us study to join all the parts of virtue in proper union, to be consistently and uniformly good—just and upright, as well as pitiful and courteous—pious, as well as sympathising. Let us pray to him who made the heart, that he would fill it with all proper dispositions—rectify all its errors—and render it the happy abode of personal integrity and social tenderness, of purity, benevolence, and devotion.

S E R M O N XXXIII.

On the IMPROVEMENT of TIME.

GENESIS xlvii. 8.

And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?

TIME is of so great importance to mankind, that it cannot too often employ religious meditation. There is nothing, in the management of which wisdom is more requisite, or where mankind display their inconsistency more. In its particular parcels, they appear entirely careless of it; and throw it away with thoughtless profusion. But, when collected into some of its great portions, and viewed as the measure of their continuance in life, they become sensible of its value, and begin to regard it with a serious eye. While day after day is wasted in a course of idleness or vicious pleasures, if some incident shall occur, which leads the most inconsiderate man to think of his age, or time of life—how much of it is gone—at what period of it he is now arrived—and to what proportion of it he can with any probability look forward, as yet to come; he can hardly avoid feeling some secret compunction, and reflecting seriously upon his state. Happy, if that virtuous impression were not of momentary continuance, but retained its influence amidst the succeeding cares and pleasures of the world! To the good old patriarch, mentioned in the text, we have reason to believe that such impressions were habitual. The question put to him by the Egyptian monarch produced, in his answer, such reflexions as were naturally suited to his time of life, *And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an*

hundred and thirty years : few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage. But the peculiar circumstances of the patriarch, or the number of his years, are not to be the subject of our present consideration. My purpose is, to show, how we should be affected in every period of human life, by reflexion upon our age, whether we be young, or advanced in years; in order that the question, *How old art thou?* may never be put to any of us, without some good effect. There are three different portions of our life, which such a question naturally calls to view; that part of it which is past; that which is now present; and that to which we fondly look forward, as future. Let us consider in what manner we ought to be affected by attending to each of these.

I. Let us review that part of our time which is past.—According to the progress which we have made in the journey of life, the field, which past years present to our review, will be more or less extensive. But to every one they will be found to afford sufficient matter of humiliation and regret. For where is the person, who, having acted for any time in the world, remembers not many errors, and many follies, in his past behaviour? Who dares to say, that he has improved, as he might have done, the various advantages which were afforded him; and that he recalls nothing, for which he has reason either to grieve, or to blush? When we recollect the several stages of life through which we have passed—the successive occupations in which we have been engaged—the designs we have formed—and the hopes and fears which alternately have filled our breast; how barren for most part is the remembrance—and how few traces of any thing valuable or important remain? Like characters drawn on the sand, which the next wave washes totally away, so one trivial succession of events has effaced the me-

mory of the preceding ; and though we have seemed all along to be busy, yet for much of what we have acted, we are neither wiser nor better, than if such actions had never been. Hence, let the retrospect of what is past, produce, as its first effect, humiliation in our own eyes, and abasement before God. Much do human pride and self-complacency require some correction : and that correction is never more effectually administered, than by an impartial and serious review of former life.

But though past time be gone, we are not to consider it as irredeemably lost. To a very profitable purpose it may yet be applied, if we lay hold of it while it remains in remembrance, and oblige it to contribute to future improvement. If you have gained nothing more by the years that are past, you have at least gained experience ; and experience is the mother of wisdom. You have seen the weak parts of your character ; and may have discovered the chief sources of your misconduct. To these let your attention be directed ; on these, let the proper guards be set. If you have trifled long, resolve to trifle no more. If your passions have often betrayed and degraded you, study how they may be kept in future, under better discipline. Learn, at the same time, never to trust presumptuously in your own wisdom. Humbly apply to the Author of your being, and beseech his grace to guide you safely through those slippery and dangerous paths, in which experience has shown that you are so ready to err, and to fall.

In reviewing past life, it cannot but occur, that many things now appear of inconsiderable importance, which once occupied and attached us, in the highest degree. Where are those keen competitions, those mortifying disappointments, those violent enmities, those eager pursuits, which we once thought were to last for ever, and on which we considered our whole happiness or misery as suspended ? We

look back upon them now, as upon a dream which has passed away. None of those mighty consequences have followed, which we had predicted. The airy fabric has vanished, and left no trace behind it. We smile at our former violence; and wonder how such things could have ever appeared so significant and great. We may rest assured, that what hath been, shall again be. When Time shall once have laid his lenient hand on the passions and pursuits of the present moment, they too shall lose that imaginary value which heated fancy now bestows upon them. Hence, let them already begin to subside to their proper level. Let wisdom infuse a tincture of moderation into the eagerness of contest, by anticipating that period of coolness, which the lapse of time will of itself, certainly bring. When we look back on years that are past, how swiftly do they appear to have fled away? How insensibly has one period of life stolen upon us after another, like the successive incidents in *a tale that is told*? Before we were aware, childhood had grown up into youth; youth had passed into manhood; and manhood now, perhaps, begins to assume the grey hair, and to decline into old age. When we are carrying our views forward, months and years to come seem to stretch through a long and extensive space. But when the time shall arrive of our looking back, they shall appear contracted within narrow bounds. Time, when yet before us, seems to advance with slow and tardy steps; no sooner is it past, than we discern its wings.

It is a remarkable peculiarity in the retrospect of former life, that it is commonly attended with some measure of heaviness of heart. Even to the most prosperous, the memory of joys that are past is accompanied with secret sorrow. In the days of former years, many objects arise to view, which make the most unthinking, grave; and render the serious, sad. The pleasureable scenes of youth, the objects on

which our affections had been early placed, the companions and friends with whom we had spent many happy days, even the places and the occupations to which we had been long accustomed, but to which we have now bid farewell, can hardly ever be recalled, without softening, nor, sometimes, without piercing the heart. Such sensations, to which few, if any, of my hearers, are wholly strangers, I now mention, as affording a strong proof of that vanity of the human state, which is so often represented in the sacred writings: and vain indeed must that state be, where shades of grief tinge the recollection of its brightest scenes. But, at the same time, though it be very proper that such meditations should sometimes enter the mind, yet on them I advise not the gentle and tender heart to dwell too long. They are apt to produce a fruitless melancholy; to deject, without bringing much improvement; to thicken the gloom, which already hangs over human life, without furnishing proportionable assistance to virtue.

Let me advise you, rather to recal to view such parts of former conduct, if any such there be, as afford in the remembrance a rational satisfaction. And what parts of conduct are these? Are they the pursuits of sensual pleasure, the riots of jollity, or the displays of show and vanity? No; I appeal to your hearts, my friends, if what you recollect with most pleasure be not the innocent, the virtuous, the honourable parts of your past life; when you were employed in cultivating your minds, and improving them with useful knowledge; when, by regular application and persevering labour, you were laying the foundation of future reputation and advancement; when you were occupied in discharging with fidelity the duties of your station, and acquiring the esteem of the worthy and the good; when in some trying situation you were enabled to act your part with firmness and honour; or had seized the happy opportunity of assisting the deserving, of relieving

the distressed, and bringing down upon your heads the *blessings of those that were ready to perish.* These, these are the parts of former life, which are recalled with most satisfaction! On them alone, no heaviness of heart attends. You enjoy them as a treasure which is now stored up, and put beyond all danger of being lost. These cheer the hours of sadness, lighten the burden of old age, and, through the mortifying remembrance of much of the past, dart a ray of light and joy. From the review of these, and the comparison of them with the deceitful pleasures of sin, let us learn how to form our estimate of happiness. Let us learn what is true, what is false, in human pleasures; and from experience of the past, judge of the quarter to which we must in future turn, if we would lay a foundation for permanent satisfaction. After having thus reviewed the former years of our life, let us consider,

II. What attention is due to that period of age, in which we are at present placed. Here lies the immediate and principal object of our concern. For the recollection of the past is only as far of moment, as it acts upon the present. The past, to us now is little; the future, as yet, is nothing. Between these two great gulphs of time subsists the present, as an isthmus or bridge, along which we are all passing. With hasty and inconsiderate steps let us not pass along it; but remember well, how much depends upon our holding a steady, and properly conducted course. *Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it now with all thy might; for now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.* Many directions might be given for the wise and religious improvement of the present; a few of which only I shall hint.

Let us begin with excluding those superfluous avocations which unprofitably consume it. Life is short; much that is of real importance remains to be done. If we suffer the present time to be wasted either in

absolute idleness, or in frivolous employments, it will hereafter call for vengeance against us. Removing, therefore, what is merely superfluous, let us bethink ourselves of what is most material to be attended to at present; as, first and chief, the great work of our salvation; the discharge of the religious duties which we owe to God our Creator, and to Christ our Redeemer. *God waiteth as yet to be gracious*: whether he will wait longer, none of us can tell. Now, therefore, *seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him, while he is near*. Our spiritual interests will be best promoted by regular performance of all the duties of ordinary life. Let these, therefore, occupy a great share of the present hour. Whatever our age, our character, our profession, or station in the world, requires us to do, in that let each revolving day find us busy. Never delay till to-morrow what reason and conscience tell you ought to be performed to day. To-morrow is not yours; and though you should live to enjoy it, you must not overload it with a burden not its own. *Sufficient for the day will prove the duty thereof*.

The observance of order and method, is of high consequence for the improvement of present time. He, who performs every employment in its due place and season, suffers no part of time to escape without profit. He multiplies his days; for he lives much in little space. Whereas he, who neglects order in the arrangement of his occupations, is always losing the present in returning upon the past, and trying, in vain, to recover it when gone. Let me advise you frequently to make the present employment of time an object of thought. Ask yourselves, about what are you now busied? What is the ultimate scope of your present pursuits and cares? Can you justify them to yourselves? Are they likely to produce any thing that will survive the moment, and bring forth some fruit for futurity? He who can give no satisfactory answer to such

questions as these, has reason to suspect that his employment of the present is not tending either to his advantage, or his honour. Finally, let me admonish you, that while you study to improve, you should endeavour also to enjoy the present hour. Let it not be disturbed with groundless discontents, or poisoned with foolish anxieties about what is to come: but look up to heaven, and acknowledge, with a grateful heart, the actual blessings you enjoy. If you must admit, that you are now in health, peace, and safety—without any particular or uncommon evils to afflict your condition—what more can you reasonably look for, in this vain and uncertain world? How little can the greatest prosperity add to such a state? Will any future situation ever make you happy, if now, with so few causes of grief, you imagine yourselves miserable? The evil lies in the state of your mind, not in your condition of fortune; and by no alteration of circumstances is likely to be remedied. Let us now,

III. Consider with what dispositions we ought to look forward to those years of our life that may yet be to come. Merely to look forward to them, is what requires no admonition. Futurity is the great object on which the imaginations of men are employed; for the sake of which the past is forgotten, and the present too often neglected. All time is in a manner swallowed up by it. On futurity, men build their designs; on futurity they rest their hopes; and though not happy at the present, they always reckon on becoming so, at some subsequent period of their lives. This propensity to look forward, was, for wise purposes, implanted in the human breast: It serves to give proper occupation to the active powers of the mind, and to quicken all its exertions. But it is too often immoderately indulged, and grossly abused. The curiosity, which sometimes prompts persons to enquire, by unlawful methods, into what is to come, is equally foolish and

sinful. Let us restrain all desire of penetrating farther than is allowed us, into that dark and unknown region. Futurity belongs to God : and happy for us is that mysterious veil with which his wisdom has covered it. Were it in our power to lift up the veil, and to behold what it conceals, many and many a thorn we would plant in our breasts. The proper and rational conduct of men with regard to futurity, is regulated by two considerations : first, that much of what it contains, must remain to us absolutely unknown ; next, that there are also some events in it, which may be certainly known and foreseen.

First, much of futurity is, and must be, entirely unknown to us. When we speculate about the continuance of our life, and the events which are to fill it, we behold a river which is always flowing ; but which soon escapes out of our sight, and is covered with mists and darkness. Some of its windings we may endeavour to trace ; but it is only for a very short way that we are able to pursue them. In endless conjectures we quickly find ourselves bewildered ; and, often, the next event that happens, baffles all the reasonings we had formed concerning the succession of events. The consequence, which follows from this, is, that all the anxiety about futurity, which passes the bounds of reasonable precaution, is unprofitable and vain. Certain measures are, indeed, necessary to be taken for our safety. We are not to rush forward inconsiderate and headlong. We must make, as far as we are able, provision for future welfare ; and guard against dangers which apparently threaten. But having done this, we must stop ; and leave the rest to Him who disposeth of futurity at his will. *He, who sitteth in the heavens, laughs, at the wisdom and the plans of worldly men. Wherefore, boast not thyself of to-morrow ; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. For the same reason, despair not of to-morrow ; for it may bring*

forth good as well as evil. Vex not yourselves with imaginary fears. The impending black cloud, to which you look up with so much dread, may pass by harmless; or though it should discharge the storm, yet, before it breaks, you may be lodged in that lowly mansion which no storms ever touch.

In the next place, there are in futurity some events which may be certainly foreseen by us, through all its darkness. First, it may be confidently predicted, that no situation, into which it will bring us, shall ever answer fully to our hopes, or confer perfect happiness. This is as certain as if we already saw it, that life, in its future periods, will continue to be what it has heretofore been; that it will be a mixed and varied state—a chequered scene of pleasures and pains, of fugitive joys and transient griefs, succeeding in a round to one another. Whether we look forward to the years of youth, or to those of manhood and advanced life, it is all the same. The world will be to us, what it has been to generations past. Set out, therefore on what remains of your journey under this persuasion. According to this measure, estimate your future pleasures, and calculate your future gains. Carry always along with you a modest and a temperate mind. Let not your expectations, from the years that are to come, rise too high; and your disappointments will be fewer, and more easily supported.

Farther; this may be reckoned upon as certain, that in every future situation of life, a good conscience, a well-ordered mind, and an humble trust in the favour of heaven, will prove the essential ingredients of your happiness. In reflecting upon the past, you have found this to hold. Assure yourselves that in future, the case will be the same. The principal correctives of human vanity and distress, must be sought for in religion and virtue. Entering on paths, which to you are new and unknown, place yourselves under the conduct of a divine guide. Follow the great *Shepherd of Israel*, who, amidst the

turmoil of this world, leads his flock *into green pastures, and by the still waters.* As you advance in life, study to improve both in good principles, and in good practice. You will be enabled to look to futurity without fear, if, whatever it brings, it shall find you regularly employed in *doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the Lord your God.*

Lastly, Whatever other things may be dubious in futurity, two great events are undoubtedly certain, death and judgment. These, we all know, are to terminate the whole course of time: and we know them to be not only certain, but to be approaching nearer to us, in consequence of every day that passes over our heads. To these, therefore, let us look forward, not with the dread of children, but with that manly seriousness which belongs to men and christians. Let us not avert our view from them, as if we could place them at some greater distance by excluding them from our thoughts. This, indeed, is the refuge of too many: but it is the refuge of fools, who aggravate thereby the terrors they must encounter. *For he that cometh, shall come, and will not tarry.* To his coming, let us look with a steady eye; and as life advances, through its progressive stages, prepare for its close, and for appearing before him who made us.

Thus I have endeavoured to point out the reflexions proper to be made, when the question is put to any of us, *How old art thou?* I have shown with what eye we should review the past years of our life—in what light we should consider the present—and with what dispositions look forward to the future: in order that such a question may always leave some serious impression behind it; and may dispose us *so to number the years of our life, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

S E R M O N XXXIV.

On the DUTIES belonging to MIDDLE AGE.

I CORINTHIANS xiii. II.

—When I became a man, I put away childish things.

TO every thing, says the wise man, *there is a season; and a time to every purpose under heaven* *. As there are duties, which belong to particular situations of fortune, so there are duties also, which result from particular periods of human life. In every period of it, indeed, that comprehensive rule takes place, *Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man* †. Piety to God, and charity to men, are incumbent upon persons of every age, as soon as they can think and act. Yet these virtues, in different stages of life, assume different forms; and when they appear in that form, which is most suited to our age, they appear with peculiar gracefulness; they give propriety to conduct, and add dignity to character. In former discourses, I have treated of the virtues which adorn youth, and of the duties which specially belong to old age ‡. The circle of those duties which respect middle age is indeed much larger. As that is the busy period in the life of man, it includes in effect the whole compass of religion, and therefore cannot have its peculiar character so definitely marked and ascertained. At the same time, during those years, wherein one is sensible that he has advanced beyond the confines of youth, but has not yet passed into the region of old age, there are several things which reflexion on that portion of human life suggests, or

* Eccles. iii. 1. † Eccles. xii. 13. ‡ See vol. I. Sermons 11, 12.

at least ought to suggest, to the mind. Inconsiderate must he be, who, in his gradual progress through-out middle age, pauses not, at times, to think, how far he is now receding from youth; how near he draws to the borders of declining age; what part it is now incumbent on him to act; what duties both God and the world have a title to expect from him. To these, I am at present to call your attention; as what materially concern the greatest part of those who are now my hearers.

I. I begin with observing, that the first duty of those, who are become men, is, as the text expresses it, *to put away childish things*. The season of youthful levities, follies, and passions, is now over. These have had their reign—a reign perhaps too long; and to which a termination is certainly proper at last. Much indulgence is due to youth. Many things admit of excuse then, which afterwards become unpardonable. Some things may even be graceful in youth, which, if not criminal, are at least ridiculous, in persons of maturer years. It is a great trial of wisdom, to make our retreat from youth with propriety; to assume the character of manhood, without exposing ourselves to reproach, by an unseasonable remainder of juvenility, on the one hand, or by precise and disgusting formality, on the other. Nature has placed certain boundaries by which she discriminates the pleasures, actions, and employments, that are suited to the different stages of human life. It becomes us, neither to overleap those boundaries by a transition too hasty and violent; nor to hover too long on one side of the limit, when nature calls us to pass over to the other.

There are, particularly, two things in which middle age should preserve its distinction and separation from youth; these are, levities of behaviour, and intemperate indulgence of pleasure. The gay spirits of the young often prompt an inconsiderate degree

of levity, sometimes amusing, sometimes offensive; but for which, though betraying them occasionally into serious dangers, their want of experience may plead excuse. A more composed and manly behaviour is expected in riper years. The affectation of youthful vanities, degrades the dignity of manhood; even renders its manners less agreeable; and by awkward attempts to please, produces contempt. Cheerfulness is becoming in every age. But the proper cheerfulness of a man is as different from the levity of the boy, as the flight of the eagle is from the fluttering of a sparrow in the air.

As all unseasonable returns to the levity of youth ought to be laid aside—an admonition which equally belongs to both the sexes—still more are we to guard against those intemperate indulgences of pleasure, to which the young are unhappily prone. From these we cannot too soon retreat. They open the path to ruin, in every period of our days. As long, however, as these excesses are confined to the first stage of life, hope is left, that when this fever of the spirits shall abate, sobriety may gain the ascendant, and wiser counsels have power to influence the conduct. But after the season of youth is past, if its intemperate spirit remain—if, instead of listening to the calls of honour, and bending attention to the cares and the business of men, the same course of idleness and sensuality continue to be pursued, the case becomes more desperate. A sad presumption arises, that long immaturity is to prevail, and that the pleasures and passions of the youth are to sink and overwhelm the man. Difficult, I confess, it may prove to overcome the attachments which youthful habits had for a long while been forming. Hard, at the beginning, is the task, to impose on our conduct restraints which are altogether unaccustomed and new. But this is a trial which every one must undergo, in entering on new scenes of action, and new periods of life. Let those, who are in

this situation, bethink themselves, that all is now at stake. Their character and honour, their future fortune and success in the world, depend in a great measure on the steps they take, when first they appear on the stage of active life. The world then looks to them with an observing eye. It studies their behaviour; and interprets all their motions, as prefaces of the line of future conduct which they mean to hold. Now, therefore, *put away childish things*; dismiss your former trifling amusements, and youthful pleasures, blast not the hopes which your friends are willing to conceive of you. Higher occupations, more serious cares, await you. Turn your mind to the steady and vigorous discharge of the part you are called to act.—This leads me,

II. To point out the particular duties which open on those who are in the middle period of life. They are now come forward to that field of action, where they are to mix in all the stir and bustle of the world; where all the human powers are brought forth into full exercise; where all that is conceived to be important in human affairs is incessantly going on around them. The time of youth was the preparation for future action. In old age our active part is supposed to be finished, and rest is permitted. Middle age is the season when we are expected to display the fruits which education had prepared and ripened. In this world, all of us were formed to be assistants to one another. The wants of society call for every man's labour, and require various departments to be filled up. They require that some be appointed to rule, and others to obey; some to defend the society from danger, others to maintain its internal order and peace; some to provide the conveniences of life, others to promote the improvement of the mind; many, to work; others to contrive and direct. In short, within the sphere of society, there is employment for every one: and in the course of these employments, many a moral duty is to be

performed; many a religious grace to be exercised. No one is permitted to be a mere blank in the world. No rank, nor station, no dignity of birth, nor extent of possessions, exempt any man from contributing his share to public utility and good. This is the precept of God. This is the voice of nature. This is the just demand of the human race upon one another.

One of the first questions, therefore, which every man, who is in the vigour of his age should put to himself is, "What am I doing in this world? What have I yet done, whereby I may glorify God, and be useful to my fellows? Do I properly fill up the place which belongs to my rank and station? Will any memorial remain of my having existed on the earth? Or are my days passing fruitless away, now when I might be of some importance in the system of human affairs?"

Let not any man imagine, that he is of no importance, and has, upon that account, a privilege to trifle with his days at pleasure. *Talents* have been given to all; to some, *ten*; to others, *five*; to others, *two*. *Occupy with these* till I come*, is the command of the great Master, to all.—Where superior abilities are possessed, or distinguished advantages of fortune are enjoyed, a wider range is afforded for useful exertion, and the world is entitled to expect it. But among those, who fill up the inferior departments of society, though the sphere of usefulness be more contracted, no one is left entirely insignificant. Let us remember, that in all stations and conditions, the important relations take place, of masters or servants, husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and friends, citizens and subjects. The discharge of the duties arising from those various relations, forms a great portion of the work assigned to the middle age of man. Though the part we have to act, may be confined

* Luke xix. 13.

within an humble line, yet if it be honourably acted, it will be always found to carry its own reward.

In fine, industry, in all its virtuous forms, ought to inspirit and invigorate manhood. This will add to it both satisfaction and dignity; will make the current of our years, as they roll, flow along in a clear and equable stream, without the putrid stagnation of sloth and idleness. Idleness is the great corrupter of youth, and the bane and dishonour of middle age. He who, in the prime of life, finds time to hang heavy on his hands, may with much reason suspect, that he has not consulted the duties which the consideration of his age imposed upon him; assuredly he has not consulted his own happiness. But amidst all the bustle of the world, let us not forget,

III. To guard with vigilance against the peculiar dangers which attend the period of middle life. It is much to be regretted, that in the present state of things, there is no period of man's age in which his virtue is not exposed to perils. Pleasure lays its snares for youth; and after the season of youthful follies is past, other temptations, no less formidable to virtue, presently arise. The love of pleasure is succeeded by the passion for interest. In this passion, the whole mind is too often absorbed; and the change thereby induced on the character is of no amiable kind. Amidst the excesses of youth, virtuous affections often remain. The attachments of friendship, the love of honour, and the warmth of sensibility, give a degree of lustre to the character, and cover many a failing. But interest, when it is become the ruling principle, both debases the mind, and hardens the heart. It deadens the feeling of every thing that is sublime or refined. It contracts the affections within a narrow circle; and extinguishes all those sparks of generosity and tenderness which once glowed in the breast.

In proportion as worldly pursuits multiply, and competitions rise, ambition, jealousy, and envy, com-

bine with interest to excite bad passions, and to increase the corruption of the heart. At first, perhaps, it was a man's intention to advance himself in the world by none but fair and laudable methods. He retained for some time an aversion to whatever appeared dishonourable. But here he is encountered by the violence of an enemy. There he is supplanted by the address of a rival. The pride of a superior insults him. The ingratitude of a friend provokes him.—Animosities ruffle his temper. Suspicions poison his mind. He finds, or imagines that he finds, the artful and designing surrounding him on every hand. He views corruption and iniquity prevailing—the modest neglected—the forward and the crafty rising to distinction. Too easily, from the example of others, he learns that mystery of vice, called the way of the world. What he has learned, he fancies necessary to practise for his own defence; and of course assumes that supple and versatile character, which he observes to be frequent, and which often has appeared to him successful.

To these, and many more dangers of the same kind, is the man exposed, who is deeply engaged in active life. No small degree of firmness in religious principle, and of constancy in virtue, is requisite, in order to prevent his being assimilated to the spirit of the world, and carried away by the *multitude of evil doers*. Let him therefore call to mind those principles which ought to fortify him against such temptations to vice. Let him often recollect, that, whatever his station in life may be, he is a man; he is a christian. These are the chief characters which he has to support—characters superior far, if they be supported with dignity, to any of the titles with which courts can decorate him—superior to all that can be acquired in the strife of a busy world. Let him think, that though it may be desirable to increase his opulence, or to advance his rank, yet what he ought to hold much more sacred,

is, to maintain his integrity and honour. If these be forfeited, wealth or station will have few charms left. They will not be able to protect him long from sinking into contempt, in the eye of an observing world. Even to his own eye, he will at last appear base and wretched—Let not the affairs of the world entirely engross his time and thoughts. From that contagious air, which he breathes in the midst of it, let him sometimes retreat into the salutary shade, consecrated to devotion and to wisdom. There, conversing seriously with his own soul, and looking up to the Father of spirits, let him study to calm those unquiet passions, and to rectify those internal disorders, which intercourse with the world had excited and increased. In order to render this medicine of the mind more effectual, it will be highly proper,

IV. That as we advance in the course of years, we often attend to the lapse of time and life, and to the revolutions which these are ever effecting. In this meditation, one of the first reflexions which should occur, is, how much we owe to that God who hath hitherto helped us; who hath brought us on so far in life; hath guided us through the slippery paths of youth; and now enables us to flourish in the strength of manhood. Look back, my friends, to those who started along with yourselves in the race of life. Think how many of them have fallen around you. Observe how many blank spaces you can number in the catalogue of those who were once your companions. If, in the midst of so much devastation, you have been preserved and blessed—consider seriously what returns you owe to the goodness of heaven. Enquire whether your conduct has corresponded to these obligations; whether, in public and in private, you have honoured, as became you, the God of your fathers; and whether, amidst the unknown occurrences that are yet before you, you have ground to hope for the continued protection of the Almighty.

Bring to mind the various revolutions which you have beheld in human affairs, since you became actors on this busy theatre. Reflect on the changes which have taken place in men and manners, in opinions and customs, in private fortunes, and in public conduct. By the observations you have made on these, and the experience you have gained, have you improved proportionably in wisdom? Have the changes of the world, which you have witnessed, loosened all unreasonable attachment to it? Have they taught you this great lesson, that, while *the fashion of the world* is ever *passing away*, only in God and in virtue, stability is to be found? Of great use, amidst the whirl of the world, are such pauses as these in life—such resting places of thought and reflexion, whence we can calmly and deliberately look back on the past, and anticipate the future.

To the future, we are often casting an eager eye, and fondly storing it, in our imagination, with many a pleasing scene. But if we would look to it, like wise men, let it be under the persuasion, that it is nearly to resemble the past, in bringing forward a mixture of alternate hopes and fears, of griefs and joys. In order to be prepared for whatever it may bring, let us cultivate that manly fortitude of mind, which, supported by a pious trust in God, will enable us to encounter properly the vicissitudes of our state. No quality is more necessary than this, to them who are passing through that stormy season of life, of which we now treat. Softness and effeminacy, let them leave to the young and unexperienced, who are amusing themselves with florid prospects of bliss. But to those, who are now engaged in the middle of their course, who are supposed to be well acquainted with the world, and to know that they have to struggle in it with various hardships, firmness, vigour, and resolution, are dispositions more suitable. They must buckle on well this armour of the mind, if they would issue forth into the contest

with any prospect of success. While we thus study to correct the errors, and to provide against the dangers, which are peculiar to this stage of life, let us also,

V. Lay foundation for comfort in old age. That is a period which all expect and hope to see; and to which, amidst the toils of the world, men sometimes look forward, not without satisfaction, as to the period of retreat and rest. But let them not deceive themselves. A joyless and dreary season it will prove, if they arrive at it with an unimproved, or corrupted mind. For old age, as for every other thing, a certain preparation is requisite; and that preparation consists chiefly in three particulars—in the acquisition of knowledge, of friends, of virtue. There is an acquisition of another kind, of which it is altogether needless for me to give any recommendation, that of riches. But though this, by many, will be esteemed a more material acquisition than all the three I have named, it may be confidently pronounced, that, without these other requisites, all the wealth we can lay up in store will prove insufficient for making our latter days pass smoothly away.

First, he, who wishes to render his old age comfortable, should study betimes to enlarge and improve his mind—and by thought and inquiry, by reading and reflecting, to acquire a taste for useful knowledge. This will provide for him a great and noble entertainment, when other entertainments leave him. If he bring into the solitary retreat of age a vacant, uninformed mind, where no knowledge dawns, where no ideas rise, which has nothing to feed upon within itself, many a heavy and comfortless day he must necessarily pass. Next, when a man declines into the vale of years, he depends more on the aid of his friends, than in any other period of his life. Then is the time, when he would especially wish to find himself surrounded by

some who love and respect him ; who will bear with his infirmities, relieve him of his labours, and cheer him with their society. Let him, therefore, now, in the summer of his days, while yet active and flourishing, by acts of seasonable kindness and beneficence ensure that love, and by upright and honourable conduct, lay foundation for that respect, which in old age he would wish to enjoy. In the last place, let him consider a good conscience, peace with God, and the hope of heaven, as the most effectual consolations he can possess, when the *evil days* shall come, wherein, otherwise, he is likely to find little pleasure. It is not merely by transient acts of devotion that such consolations are to be provided. The regular tenor of a virtuous and pious life, spent in the faithful discharge of all the duties of our station, will prove the best preparation for old age, for death, and for immortality.

Among the measures thus taken for the latter scenes of life, let me admonish every one not to forget to put his worldly affairs in order, in due time. This is a duty which he owes to his character, to his family, or to those, whoever they be, that are to succeed him—but a duty too often unwisely delayed, from a childish aversion to entertain any thoughts of quitting the world. Let him not trust much to what he will do in his old age. Sufficient for that day, if he shall live to see it, will be the burden thereof. It has been remarked, that as men advance in years, they care less to think of death. Perhaps it occurs oftener to the thoughts of the young, than of the old. Feebleness of spirit renders melancholy ideas more oppressive ; and after having been so long accustomed and inured to the world, men bear worse with any thing which reminds them they must soon part with it. However, as to part with it is the doom of all, let us take measures betimes for going off the stage, when it shall be our turn to withdraw, with decency and

propriety; leaving nothing unfulfilled which it is expedient to have done before we die. To live long, ought not to be our favourite wish, so much as to live well. By continuing too long on earth, we might only live to witness a greater number of melancholy scenes, and to expose ourselves to a wider compass of human woe. He, who has served his generation faithfully in the world, has duly honoured God, and been beneficent and useful to mankind—he, who in his life has been respected and beloved—whose death is accompanied with the sincere regret of all who knew him, and whose memory is honoured—that man has sufficiently fulfilled his course, whether it was appointed by providence to be long or short. For *honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years; but wisdom is the grey hair to man; and an unspotted life is old age* *.

S E R M O N X X X V .

O N D E A T H .

ECCLESIASTES xii. 5.

—*Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.*

THIS is a sight which incessantly presents itself. Our eyes are so much accustomed to it, that it hardly makes any impression. Throughout every season of the year, and during the course of almost every day, the funerals, which pass along the streets, show us *man going to his long home*. Were death a rare and uncommon object—were it only once in the course of a man's life, that he beheld one of his fel-

* Wisdom iv. 8, 9.

low-creatures carried to the grave, a solemn awe would fill him; he would stop short in the midst of his pleasures; he would even be chilled with secret horror. Such impressions, however, would prove unsuitable to the nature of our present state. When they became so strong as to render men unfit for the ordinary business of life, they would in a great measure defeat the intention of our being placed in this world. It is better ordered by the wisdom of Providence, that they should be weakened by the frequency of their recurrence; and so tempered by the mixture of other passions, as to allow us to go on freely in acting our parts on earth.

Yet, familiar as death is now become, it is undoubtedly fit, that by an event of so important a nature, some impression should be made upon our minds. It ought not to pass over, as one of those common incidents which are beheld without concern, and awaken no reflexion. There are many things which the funerals of our fellow-creatures are calculated to teach; and happy it were for the gay and dissipated, if they would listen more frequently to the instructions of so awful a monitor. In the context, the wise man had described, under a variety of images suited to the eastern style, the growing infirmities of old age, until they arrive at that period which concludes them all; when, as he beautifully expresses it, *the silver cord being loosened, and the golden bowl broken, the pitcher being broken at the fountain, and the wheel at the cistern, man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.* In discoursing from these words, it is not my purpose to treat, at present, of the instructions to be drawn from the prospect of our own death. I am to confine myself to the death of others; to consider death as one of the most frequent and considerable events that happen in the course of human affairs; and to show in what manner we ought to be affected, first, by the death of strangers, or indifferent per-

sons ; secondly, by the death of friends ; and thirdly, by the death of enemies.

I. By the death of indifferent persons ; if any can be called indifferent, to whom we are so nearly allied as brethern by nature, and brethern in mortality. When we observe the funerals that pass along the streets, or when we walk among the monuments of death, the first thing, that naturally strikes us, is the undistinguishing blow, with which that common enemy levels all. We behold a great promiscuous multitude all carried to the same abode—all lodged in the same dark and silent mansions. There, mingle persons of every age and character, of every rank and condition in life—the young and the old, the poor and the rich, the gay and the grave, the renowned and the ignoble. A few weeks ago, most of those, whom we have seen carried to the grave, walked about as we do now on the earth ; enjoyed their friends ; beheld the light of the sun ; and were forming designs for future days. Perhaps, it is not long since they were engaged in scenes of high festivity. For them, perhaps, the cheerful company assembled ; and in the midst of the circle they shone with gay and pleasing vivacity. But now—to them, all is finally closed. To them, no more shall the seasons return, or the sun arise. No more shall they hear the voice of mirth, or behold the face of man. They are swept from the universe, as though they had never been. *They are carried away as with a flood : the wind has passed over them, and they are gone.*

When we contemplate this desolation of the human race—this final termination of so many hopes—this silence that now reigns among those who, a little while ago, were so busy, or so gay—who can avoid being touched with sensations at once awful and tender ? What heart but then warms with the glow of humanity ? In whose eye does not the tear gather, on revolving the fate of passing and short-

lived man? Such sensations are so congenial to human nature, that they are attended with a certain kind of sorrowful pleasure. Even voluptuaries themselves sometimes indulge a taste for funeral melancholy. After the festive assembly is dismissed, they choose to walk retired in the shady grove, and to contemplate the venerable sepulchres of their ancestors. This melancholy pleasure arises from two different sentiments meeting at the same time in the breast; a sympathetic sense of the shortness and vanity of life—and a persuasion, that something exists after death—sentiments which unite at the view of *the house appointed for all living*. A tomb, it has been justly said, is a monument situated on the confines of both worlds. It, at once, presents to us the termination of the inquietudes of life, and sets before us the image of eternal rest. *There*, in the elegant expressions of Job, *the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master*. It is very remarkable, that in all languages, and among all nations, death has been described in a style of this kind—expressed by figures of speech, which convey every where the same idea of rest, or sleep, or retreat from the evils of life. Such a style perfectly agrees with the general belief of the soul's immortality; but assuredly conveys no high idea of the boasted pleasures of the world. It shows how much all mankind have felt this life to be a scene of trouble and care; and and have agreed in opinion, that perfect rest is to be expected only in the grave.

There, says Job, *are the small and the great*. There the poor man lays down at last the burden of his wearisome life. No more shall he groan under the load of poverty and toil. No more shall he hear the insolent calls of the master, from whom he received his scanty wages. No more shall he be rais-

ed from needful slumber on his bed of straw, nor be hurried away from his homely meal, to undergo the repeated labours of the day. While his humble grave is preparing, and a few poor and decayed neighbours are carrying him thither, it is good for us to think, that this man too was our brother; that for him the aged and destitute wife, and the needy children now weep; that, neglected as he was by the world, he possessed perhaps both a sound understanding, and a worthy heart; and is now carried by angels to rest in Abraham's bosom. At no great distance from him, the grave is opened to receive the rich and proud man. For, as it is said with emphasis in the parable, *the rich man also died, and was buried* *.—He also died. His riches prevented not his sharing the same fate with the poor man; perhaps, through luxury, they accelerated his doom. Then, indeed, *the mourners go about the streets*; and while in all the pomp and magnificence of woe, his funeral is prepared, his heirs, in the mean time, impatient to examine his will, are looking on one another with jealous eyes, and already beginning to quarrel about the division of his substance.

One day, we see carried along the coffin of the smiling infant; the flower just nipped, as it began to blossom in the parents' view: and the next day we behold the young man, or young woman, of blooming form and promising hopes, laid in an untimely grave. While the funeral is attended by a numerous, unconcerned company, who are discoursing to one another about the news of the day, or the ordinary affairs of life, let our thoughts rather follow to the house of mourning, and represent to themselves what is going on there. There, we would see a disconsolate family sitting in silent grief, thinking of the sad breach that is made in their little society, and, with tears in their eyes, looking to the chamber that is now left vacant, and to every

* Luke xvi. 22.

memorial that presents itself, of their departed friend. By such attention to the woes of others, the selfish hardness of our hearts will be gradually softened, and melted down into humanity.

Another day, we follow to the grave one, who, in old age, and after a long career of life, has in full maturity sunk at last into rest. As we are going along to the mansion of the dead, it is natural for us to think, and to discourse, of all the changes which such a person has seen during the course of his life. He has passed, it is likely, through varieties of fortune. He has experienced prosperity and adversity. He has seen families and kindreds rise and fall. He has seen peace and war succeeding in their turns—the face of his country undergoing many alterations—and the very city in which he dwelt rising, in a manner, new around him. After all he has beheld, his eyes are now closed for ever. He was becoming a stranger in the midst of a new succession of men. A race, who knew him not, had arisen to fill the earth. Thus passes the world away. Throughout all ranks and conditions, *one generation passeth, and another generation cometh*; and this great inn is by turns evacuated, and replenished, by troops of succeeding pilgrims.—O vain and inconstant world! O fleeting and transient life! when will the sons of men learn to think of thee, as they ought? When will they learn humanity from the afflictions of their brethren; or moderation and wisdom, from the sense of their own fugitive state?—But, now to come nearer to ourselves, let us,

II. Consider the death of our friends. Want of reflexion, or the long habits, either of a very busy, or a very dissipated life, may have rendered men insensible to all such objects, as I have now described. The stranger and the unknown fall utterly unnoticed at their side. Life proceeds with them in its usual train, without being affected by events in which they take no personal concern. But the dissolution of

those ties, which had long bound men together, in intimate and familiar union, gives a painful shock to every heart. When a family, who, for years had been living in comfort and peace, are suddenly shattered, by some of their most beloved or respected members being torn from them—when the husband or the spouse are separated for ever from the companion who, amidst every vicissitude of fortune, so-laced their life—who had shared all their joys, and participated in all their sorrows—when the weeping parent is folding in his arms the dying child whom he tenderly loved—when he is giving his last blessing, receiving the last fond adieu, looking for the last time on that countenance, now wasting and faded, which he had once beheld with much delight; then is the time, when the heart is made to drink all the bitterness of human woe. But I seek not to wound your feelings by dwelling on these sad descriptions. Let us rather turn our thoughts to the manner in which such events ought to be received and improved; since happen they must in the life of man.

Then, indeed, is the time to weep. Let not a false idea of fortitude, or mistaken conceptions of religious duty, be employed to restrain the bursting emotion. Let the heart seek its relief, in the free effusion of just and natural sorrow. It is becoming in every one, to show, on such occasions, that he feels, as a man ought to feel. At the same time, let moderation temper the grief of a good man and a christian. He must not *sorrow like those who have no hope*. As high elation of spirits befits not the joys, so continued and overwhelming dejection suits not the griefs of this transitory world. Grief, when it goes beyond certain bounds, becomes unmanly; when it lasts beyond a certain time, becomes unreasonable. Let him not reject the alleviation which time brings to all the wounds of the heart, but suffer excessive grief to subside, by degrees, into a

tender and affectionate remembrance. Let him consider, that it is in the power of Providence to raise him up other comforts, in the place of those he has lost. Or, if his mind, at present, reject the thoughts of such consolation, let it turn for relief to the prospect of a future meeting in a happier world. This is, indeed, the chief soother of affliction—the most powerful balm of the bleeding heart. It assists us to view death, as no more than a temporary separation of friends. They, whom we have loved, still live, though not present to us. They are only removed into a different mansion in the house of the common Father. The toils of their pilgrimage are finished; and they are gone to the land of rest and peace. They are gone from this dark and troubled world, to join the great assembly of the just, and to dwell in the midst of everlasting life.—In due time we hope to be associated with them in these blissful habitations. Until this season of re-union arrive, no principle of religion discourages our holding correspondence of affection with them by means of faith and hope.

Meanwhile, let us respect the virtues, and cherish the memory, of the deceased. Let their little failings be now forgotten. Let us dwell on what was amiable in their character, imitate their worth, and trace their steps. By this means, the remembrance of those whom we loved shall become useful and improving to us, as well as sacred and dear—if we accustom ourselves to consider them as still speaking, and exhorting us to all that is good—if, in situations where our virtue is tried, we call up their respected idea to view, and, as placed in their presence, think of the part which we could act before them without a blush.

Moreover, let the remembrance of the friends whom we have lost, strengthen our affection to those that remain. The narrower the circle becomes, of those we love, let us draw the closer together. Let

the heart, that has been softened by sorrow, mellow into gentleness and kindness; make liberal allowance for the weaknesses of others; and divest itself of the little prejudices that may have formerly prepossessed it against them. The greater havock that death has made among our friends on earth, let us cultivate connexion more with God, and heaven, and virtue. Let those noble views, which man's immortal character affords, fill and exalt our minds. Passengers only through this sublunary region, let our thoughts often ascend to that divine country, which we are taught to consider as the native seat of the soul. There, we form connexions that are never broken. There, we meet with friends who never die. Among celestial things, there is firm and lasting constancy, while all that is on earth changes and passes away.—Such are some of the fruits we should reap from the tender feelings excited by the death of friends. But they are not only our friends who die. Our enemies also must go to their *long home*. Let us, therefore,

III. Consider how we ought to be affected, when they, from whom suspicions have alienated, or rivalry has divided us—they with whom we have long contended, or by whom we imagine ourselves to have suffered wrong, are laid, or about to be laid, in the grave. How inconsiderable then appear those broils in which we had been long involved, those contests and feuds which we thought were to last for ever! The awful moment, that now terminates them, makes us feel their vanity. If there be a spark of humanity left in the breast, the remembrance of our common fate then awakens it. Is there a man, who, if he were admitted to stand by the death-bed of his bitterest enemy, and beheld him enduring that conflict, which human nature must suffer at the last, would not be inclined to stretch forth the hand of friendship, to utter the voice of forgiveness, and to wish for perfect reconciliation with him before he

left the world? Who is there, that, when he beholds the remains of his adversary deposited in the dust, feels not, in that moment, some relentings at the remembrance of those past animosities which mutually embittered their life? "There lies the man, with whom I contended so long, silent and mute for ever. He is fallen; and I am about to follow him. How poor is the advantage which I now enjoy! Where are the fruits of all our contests? In a short time we shall be laid together, and no remembrance remain of either of us, under the sun. How many mistakes may there have been between us! Had not he his virtues and good qualities as well as I? When we shall both appear before the judgment-seat of God, shall I be found innocent, and free of blame, for all the enmity I have borne to him?" My friends, let the anticipation of such sentiments, serve now to correct the inveteracy of prejudice, to cool the heat of anger, to allay the fierceness of resentment. How unnatural is it for animosities so lasting to possess the hearts of mortal men, that nothing can extinguish them, but the cold hand of death? Is there not a sufficient proportion of evils in the short span of human life, that we seek to increase their number, by rushing into unnecessary contests with one another? When a few suns more have rolled over our heads, friends and foes shall have retreated together; and their love and their hatred be equally buried. Let our few days, then, be spent in peace. While we are all journeying onwards to death, let us rather *bear one another's burdens*, than harrass one another by the way. Let us smooth and cheer the road as much as we can, rather than fill the valley of our pilgrimage with the hateful monuments of our contention and strife.

Thus I have set before you some of those meditations, which are naturally suggested by the prevalence of death around us—by the death of stran-

gers, of friends, and of enemies. Because topics of this nature are obvious, let it not be thought that they are without use. They require to be recalled, repeated, and enforced.—Moral and religious instruction derives its efficacy, not so much from what men are taught to know, as from what they are brought to feel. It is not the dormant knowledge of any truths, but the vivid impression of them, which has influence on practice. Neither let it be thought, that such meditations are unseasonable intrusions upon those who are living in health, in affluence, and ease. There is no hazard of their making too deep or painful an impression. The gloom which they occasion, is transient; and will soon, too soon, it is probable, be dispelled by the succeeding affairs and pleasures of the world. To wisdom it certainly belongs, that men should be impressed with just views of their nature, and their state: and the pleasures of life will always be enjoyed to most advantage, when they are tempered with serious thought. There is *a time to mourn*, as well as *a time to rejoice*. There is a *virtuous sorrow, which is better than laughter*. There is a *sadness of the countenance, by which the heart is made better*.

S E R M O N XXXVI.

On the PROGRESS of VICE.

I CORINTHIANS, XV. 33.

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

THOUGH human nature be now fallen from its original honour, several good principles still remain in the hearts of men. There are few, if

any, on whose minds the reverence for a Supreme Being continues not, in some degree, impressed. In every breast, some benevolent affections are found; and conscience still retains a sense of the distinction between moral good and evil. These principles of virtue are always susceptible of improvement; and, in favourable situations, might have a happy influence on practice. But such is the frailty of our nature, and so numerous are the temptations to evil, that they are in perpetual hazard of being either totally effaced, or so far weakened, as to produce no effect on our conduct. They are good seeds originally sown in the heart; but which require culture, in order to make them rise to any maturity. If left without assistance, they are likely to be stifled, by that profusion of noxious weeds which the soil sends forth around them.

Among the numerous causes, which introduce corruption into the heart, and accelerate its growth, none is more unhappily powerful, than that which is pointed out in the text, under the description of *evil communications*; that is, the contagion which is diffused by bad examples, and heightened by particular connexions with persons of loose principles, or dissolute morals.—This, in a licentious state of society, is the most common source of those vices and disorders which so much abound in great cities; and often proves, in a particular manner, fatal to the young—even to them whose beginnings were once auspicious and promising. It may therefore be an useful employment of attention, to trace the progress of this principle of corruption; to examine the means by which *evil communications* gradually undermine, and at last destroy *good manners*, or (which here is the proper signification of the original word) *good morals*. It is indeed disagreeable to contemplate humannature, in this downward course of its progress. But it is always profitable to know our own infirmities and dangers. The consideration of them will

lead me to suggest some of the means proper to be used, for preventing the mischiefs arising from *evil communications*.

Agreeably to what I observed of certain virtuous principles being inherent in human nature, there are few but who set out at first on the world with good dispositions. The warmth, which belongs to youth, naturally exerts itself in generous feelings and sentiments of honour—in strong attachment to friends, and the other emotions of a kind and tender heart. Almost all the plans, with which persons who have been liberally educated, begin the world, are connected with honourable views. At that period, they repudiate whatever is mean or base. It is pleasing to them to think, of commanding the esteem of those among whom they live, and of acquiring a name among men. But alas! how soon does this flattering prospect begin to be overcast. Desires of pleasure usher in temptation, and forward the growth of disorderly passions. Ministers of vice are seldom wanting, to encourage and flatter the passions of the young. Inferiors study to creep into favour, by servile obsequiousness to all their desires and humours.—Glad to find any apology for the indulgences of which they are fond, the young too readily listen to the voice of those who suggest to them, that strict notions of religion, order, and virtue, are old fashioned and illiberal; that the restraints which they impose, are only fit to be prescribed to those who are in the first stage of pupillage; or to be preached to the vulgar, who ought to be kept within the closest bounds of regularity and subjection. But the goodness of their hearts, it is insinuated to them, and the liberality of their views, will fully justify their emancipating themselves, in some degree, from the rigid discipline of parents and teachers.

Soothing as such insinuations are to the youthful, and inconsiderate, their first steps, however, in vice,

are cautious and timid, and occasionally checked by remorse. As they begin to mingle more in the world, and emerge into the circles of gaiety and pleasure, finding these loose ideas countenanced by too general practice, they gradually become bolder in the liberties they take. If they have been bred to business, they begin to tire of industry, and look with contempt on the plodding race of citizens. If they be of superior rank, they think it becomes them to resemble their equals; to assume that freedom of behaviour, that air of forwardness, that tone of dissipation, that easy negligence of those with whom they converse, which appear fashionable in high life. If affluence of fortune unhappily concur to favour their inclinations, amusements and diversions succeed in a perpetual round; night and day are confounded; gaming fills up their vacant intervals; they live wholly in public places; they run into many degrees of excess, disagreeable even to themselves, merely from weak complaisance, and the fear of being ridiculed by their loose associates. Among these associates, the most hardened and determined always take the lead. The rest follow them with implicit submission; and make proficiency in this school of iniquity, in exact proportion to the weakness of their understandings, and the strength of their passions.

How many pass away, after this manner, some of the most valuable years of their life, tossed in a whirlpool of what cannot be called pleasure, so much as mere giddiness and folly? In the habits of perpetual connexion with idle or licentious company, all reflexion is lost; while, circulated from one empty head, and one thoughtless heart, to another, folly shoots up into all its most ridiculous forms; prompts the extravagant, unmeaning frolic in private; or sallies forth in public into mad riot—impelled sometimes by intoxication, sometimes by mere levity of spirits.

All the while, amidst this whole course of juvenile infatuation, I readily admit, that much good nature may still remain. Generosity and attachments may be found; nay, some awe of religion may still subsist, and some remains of those good impressions which were made upon the mind in early days. It might yet be very possible, to reclaim such persons, and to form them for useful and respectable stations in the world, if virtuous and improving society should happily succeed to the place of that idle crew with whom they now associate—if important business should occur, to bring them into a different sphere of action—or, if some seasonable stroke of affliction should in mercy be sent, to recal them to themselves, and to awaken serious and manly thought. But, if youth and vigour, and flowing fortune continue—if a similar succession of companions go on to amuse them, to engross their time, and to stir up their passions—the day of ruin,—let them take heed and beware!—the day of irrecoverable ruin, begins to draw nigh. Fortune is squandered; health is broken; friends are offended, affronted, estranged; aged parents, perhaps, sent afflicted and mourning, to the dust.

There are certain degrees of vice which are chiefly stamped with the character of the ridiculous, and the contemptible: and there are also certain limits, beyond which if it pass, it becomes odious and execrable. If, to other corruptions which the heart has already received, be added the infusion of sceptical principles, that worst of all the *evil communications* of sinners, the whole of morals is then on the point of being overthrown. For, every crime can then be palliated to conscience; every check and restraint, which had hitherto remained, is taken away. He, who, in the beginning of his course, soothed himself with the thought, that while he indulged his desires, he did hurt to no man; now, pressed by the necessity of supplying those wants,

into which his expensive pleasures have brought him, goes on, without remorse to defraud and to oppress. The lover of pleasure now becomes hardened and cruel; violates his trust, or betrays his friend; becomes a man of treachery, or a man of blood—satisfying, or at least endeavouring all the while to satisfy himself, that circumstances form his excuse; that by necessity he is impelled; and that, in gratifying the passions which nature had implanted within him, he does no more than follow nature. Miserable and deluded man! to what art thou come at the last? Dost thou pretend to follow nature, when thou art contemning the laws of the God of nature—when thou art stifling his voice within thee, which remonstrates against thy crimes—when thou art violating the best part of thy nature, by counteracting the dictates of justice and humanity? Dost thou follow nature, when thou renderest thyself an useless animal on the earth—and not useless only, but noxious to the society to which thou belongest, and to which thou art a disgrace—noxious, by the bad example thou hast set—noxious, by the crimes thou hast committed—sacrificing innocence to thy guilty pleasures, and introducing shame and ruin into the habitations of peace—defrauding of their due the unsuspecting who have trusted thee—involving in the ruins of thy fortune many a worthy family—reducing the industrious and the aged to misery and want—by all which, if thou hast escaped the deserved sword of justice, thou hast at least brought on thyself the resentment and the reproach of all the respectable and the worthy? Tremble then at the view of the gulph which is opening before thee. Look with horror at the precipice, on the brink of which thou standest: and if yet a moment be left for retreat, think how thou mayest escape, and be saved.

This brings me to what I proposed as the next head of discourse; to suggest some means that may

be used for stopping in time the progress of such mischiefs; to point out some remedies against the fatal infection of *evil communications*.

The first and most obvious is, to withdraw from all associations with bad men, with persons either of licentious principles, or of disorderly conduct. I have shewn to what issue such dangerous connexions are apt to bring men at last. Nothing therefore, is of more importance for the young, to whom I now chiefly address myself, than to be careful in the choice of their friends and companions. This choice is too frequently made without much thought, or is determined by some casual connexion; and yet, very often, the whole fate of their future life, depends upon it. The circumstances, which chiefly attract the liking and the friendship of youth, are vivacity, good humour, engaging manners, and a cheertul or easy temper; qualities, I confess, amiable in themselves, and useful and valuable in their place. But I intreat you to remember, that these are not all the qualities requisite to form an intimate companion or friend. Something more is still to be looked for—a sound understanding, a steady mind, a firm attachment to principle, to virtue, and honour. As only solid bodies polish well, it is only on the substantial ground of these manly endowments, that the other amiable qualities can receive their proper lustre. Destitute of these essential requisites, they shine with no more than a tinsel brilliancy. It may sparkle for a little, amidst a few circles of the frivolous, and superficial: but it imposes not on the discernment of the public. The world in general seldom, after a short trial, judges amiss of the characters of men. You may be assured, that its character of you will be formed by the company you frequent: and how agreeable soever they may seem to be, if nothing is to be found among them but hollow qualities, and external accomplishments, they soon fall down into the class, at best, of the

insignificant, perhaps of the worthless; and you sink, of course, in the opinion of the public, into the same despicable rank.

Allow me to warn you, that the most gay and pleasing, are sometimes the most insidious and dangerous companions; an admonition which respects both the sexes. Often they attach themselves to you from interested motives: and if any taint or suspicion lie on their character, under the cover of your rank, your fortune, or your good reputation, they seek protection for themselves. Look round you, then, with an attentive eye, and weigh characters well before you connect yourselves too closely with any who court your society. *He, that walketh with wise men, shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. Wherefore, enter not thou into the counsel of the scorner. Walk not in the way with evil men; avoid it; pass not by it; turn from it; and pass away*.*

In order to prevent the influence of *evil communications*, it is farther needful, that you fix to yourselves certain principles of conduct, and be resolved and determined on no occasion to swerve from them. Setting the consideration of religion and virtue aside, and attending merely to interest and reputation, it will be found, that he, who enters on active life, without having ascertained some regular plan, according to which he is to guide himself, will be unprosperous in the whole of his subsequent progress. But when conduct is viewed in a moral and religious light, the effect of having fixed no principles of action—of having formed no laudable standard of character, becomes more obviously fatal. For hence it is, that the young and thoughtless imbibe so readily the poison of *evil communications*, and fall a prey to every seducer. They have no internal guide whom they are accustomed to follow and obey—nothing within themselves, that can give firmness to their conduct. They are, of course,

* Prov. xiii. 20. Prov. iv. 14.

the victims of momentary inclination or caprice—religious and good by starts, when, during the absence of temptation and tempters, the virtuous principle stirs within them; but never long the same—changing and fluctuating according to the passion that chances to rise, or the instigation of those with whom they have connected themselves. They are sailing on a dangerous sea, which abounds with rocks—without compass, by which to direct their course, or helm, by which to guide the vessel. Whereas, if they acted on a system, if their behaviour made it appear that they were determined to conduct themselves by certain rules and principles, not only would they escape innumerable dangers, but they would command respect from the licentious themselves. Evil doers would cease to lay their snares for one whom they saw moving above them, in a higher sphere, and with a more steady course.

As a farther corrective of *evil communications*, and as a foundation to those principles, which you lay down for conduct, let me advise you sometimes to think seriously, of what constitutes real enjoyment and happiness. Your days cannot be entirely spent in company and pleasure. How closely soever you are surrounded and besieged by evil companions, there must be some intervals, in which you are left by yourselves; when, after all the turbulence of amusement is over, your mind will naturally assume a graver and more pensive cast. These are precious intervals, to you, if you knew their value. Seize that sober hour of retirement and silence. Indulge the meditations which then begin to rise. Cast your eye backwards on what is past of your life; look forward to what is probably to come. Think of the part you are now acting—and of what remains to be acted, perhaps to be suffered, before you die. Then is the time to form your plans of happiness, not merely for the next day, but for the general course of your life. Remember, that what is plea-

sing to you at twenty, will not be equally so at forty or fifty years of age; and that what continues longest pleasing, is always most valuable. Recollect your own feelings in different scenes of life. Enquire on what occasions you have felt the truest satisfaction; whether days of sobriety, and rational employment, have not left behind them a more agreeable remembrance, than nights of licentiousness and riot. Look round you on the world; reflect on the different societies which have fallen under your observation; and think who among them appear to enjoy life to most advantage; whether they who, encircled by gay companions, are constantly fatiguing themselves in quest of pleasure; or they, to whom pleasure comes unsought, in the course of an active, virtuous, and manly life. Compare together these two classes of mankind, and ask your own hearts, to which of them you would choose to belong. If, in a happy moment, the light of truth begins to break in upon you, refuse not admittance to the ray. If your hearts secretly reproach you for the wrong choice you have made, bethink yourselves, that the evil is not irreparable. Still there is time for repentance and retreat; and a return to wisdom, is always honourable.

Were such meditations often indulged, the *evil communications* of sinners would die away before them; the force of their poison would evaporate; the world would begin to assume in your eyes a new form and shape.—Disdain not, in these solitary hours, to recollect what the wisest have said, and have written, concerning human happiness, and human vanity. Treat not their opinions, as effusions merely of peevishness or disappointment: but believe them to be, what they truly are, the result of long experience, and thorough acquaintance, with the world. Consider, that the season of youth is passing fast away. It is time for you to be taking measures for an establishment in life: nay, it were

wife to be looking forward to a placid enjoyment of old age. That is a period you wish to see; but how miserable when it arrives, if it yield you nothing but the dregs of life, and present no retrospect except that of a thoughtless and dishonoured youth!

Let me once more advise you, to look forward sometimes beyond old age—to look to a future world. Amidst *evil communications*, let your belief, and your character as christians, arise to your view. Think of the sacred name in which you were baptized. Think of the God whom your fathers honoured and worshipped—of the religion in which they trained you up—of the venerable rites in which they brought you to partake. Their paternal cares have now ceased. They have finished their earthly course: and the time is coming, when you must follow them. You know, that you are not to live always here; and you surely do not believe that your existence is to end with this life. Into what world, then, are you next to go? Whom will you meet with there? Before whose tribunal are you to appear? What account will you be able to give, of your present trifling and irregular conduct, to him who made you? Such thoughts may be treated as unseasonable intrusions. But intrude they sometimes will, whether you make them welcome or not. Better, then, to allow them free reception when they come, and to consider fairly to what they lead. You have seen persons die; at least, you have heard of your friends dying near you. Did it never enter into your minds, to think what their last reflexions probably were, in their concluding moments; or what your own, in such a situation, would be—what would be then your hopes and fears—what part you would then wish to have acted—in what light your closing eyes would then view this life, and this world?

These are thoughts, my friends, too important to be always excluded. These are things too solemn and awful to be trifled with. They are supe-

rior to all the ridicule of fools. They come home to every man's bosom, and are entitled to every man's highest attention. Let us regard them as becomes reasonable and mortal creatures; and they will prove effectual antidotes to the *evil communications* of petulant scoffers. When vice or folly arise to tempt us under flattering forms, let the serious character, which we bear as men, come also forward to view; and let the solemn admonitions, with which I conclude, sound full in our ears: *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Come out from amongst them, and be separate. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. The way of life is above to the wise; and he, that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul**.

S E R M O N XXXVII.

On FORTITUDE.

PSALM, xxvii. 3.

Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.

THIS world is a region of danger, in which perfect safety is possessed by no man. Though we live in times of established tranquillity, when there is no ground to apprehend, that *an host* shall, in the literal sense, *encamp against us*; yet every man, from one quarter or other, has somewhat to dread. *Riches often make to themselves wings, and flee away.* The firmest health may in a moment be shaken. The most flourishing family may unexpectedly be

* Prov. i. 10. 2 Corinth. vi. 17. Eccles. xii. 1. Prov. xv. 24.

scattered. The appearances of our security are frequently deceitful.—When our sky seems most settled and serene, in some unobserved quarter gathers the little black cloud, in which the tempest ferments, and prepares to discharge itself on our head. Such is the real situation of man in this world: and he, who flatters himself with an opposite view of his state, only lives in the paradise of fools.

In this situation, no quality is more requisite than constancy, or fortitude of mind—a quality, which the psalmist appears, from the sentiment in the text, to have possessed in an eminent degree. Fortitude was justly classed by the ancient philosophers, among the cardinal virtues. It is indeed essential to the support of them all; and is most necessary to be acquired by every one who wishes to discharge with fidelity the duties of his station. It is the armour of the mind, which will fit him for encountering the trials, and surmounting the dangers, that are likely to occur in the course of his life. It may be thought, perhaps, to be a quality, in some measure, constitutional—dependent on firmness of nerves, and strength of spirits. Though, partly, it is so, yet experience shows, that it may also be acquired by principle, and be fortified by reason: and it is only when thus acquired, and thus fortified, that it can be accounted to carry the character of virtue. Fortitude is opposed, as all know, to timidity, irresolution, a feeble and a wavering spirit. It is placed, like other virtues, in the middle between two extremes—standing at an equal distance from rashness on the one hand, and from pusillanimity on the other.—In discoursing on this subject, I purpose, first, to show the importance of fortitude or constancy; next, to ascertain the grounds on which it must rest; and, lastly, to suggest some considerations for assisting the exercise of it.

I. The high importance of fortitude will easily appear, if we consider it as respecting either the hap-

pineness of human life, or the proper discharge of its duties.

Without some degree of fortitude, there can be no happiness; because, amidst the thousand uncertainties of life, there can be no enjoyment of tranquillity. The man of feeble and timorous spirit lives under perpetual alarms. He foresees every distant danger, and trembles. He explores the regions of possibility, to discover the dangers that may arise. Often he creates imaginary ones; always magnifies those that are real. Hence, like a person haunted by spectres, he loses the free enjoyment even of a safe and prosperous state. On the first shock of adversity, he desponds. Instead of exerting himself to lay hold on the resources that remain, he gives up all for lost; and resigns himself to abject and broken spirits. On the other hand, firmness of mind is the parent of tranquillity. It enables one to enjoy the present without disturbance—and to look calmly on dangers that approach, or evils that threaten in future. It suggests good hopes. It supplies resources. It allows a man to retain the full possession of himself, in every situation of fortune. Look into the heart of this man, and you will find composure, cheerfulness, and magnanimity. Look into the heart of the other, and you will see nothing but confusion, anxiety, and trepidation. The one is the castle built on a rock, which defies the attacks of surrounding waters. The other is a hut placed on the shore, which every wind shakes, and every wave overflows.

If fortitude be thus essential to the enjoyment of life, it is equally so, to the proper discharge of all its most important duties. He, who is of a cowardly mind, is, and must be a slave to the world. He fashions his whole conduct according to its hopes and fears. He smiles, and fawns, and betrays, from abject considerations of personal safety. He is incapable of either conceiving or executing any great

design. He can neither stand the clamour of the multitude, nor the frowns of the mighty. The wind of popular favour, or the threats of power, are sufficient to shake his most determined purpose. The world always knows where to find him. He may pretend to have principles; but on every trying occasion, it will be seen, that his pretended principles bend to convenience and safety. The man of virtuous fortitude, again follows the dictates of his heart, unembarrassed by those restraints which lie upon the timorous. Having once determined what is fit for him to do, no threatenings can shake, nor dangers appal him. He rests upon himself, supported by a consciousness of inward dignity. I do not say, that this disposition alone will secure him against every vice. He may be lifted up with pride. He may be seduced by pleasure. He may be hurried away by passion. But at least on one quarter, he will be safe; by no abject fears misled into evil.

Without this temper of mind, no man can be a thorough christian. For his profession, as such, requires him to be superior to that *fear of man, which bringeth a snare*; enjoins him, for the sake of a good conscience, to encounter every danger; and to be prepared, if called, even to lay down his life in the cause of religion and truth. All, who have been distinguished as servants of God, or benefactors of men—all who, in perilous situations, have acted their part with such honour as to render their names illustrious through succeeding ages, have been eminent for fortitude of mind. Of this we have one conspicuous example in the apostle Paul, whom it will be instructive for us to view in a remarkable occurrence of his life. After having long acted as the apostle of the Gentiles, his mission called him to go to Jerusalem, where he knew that he was to encounter the utmost violence of his enemies. Just before he set sail, he called together the elders of his favourite church at Ephesus, and in a pathetic speech,

which does great honour to his character, gave them his last farewell. Deeply affected by their knowledge of the certain dangers to which he was exposing himself, all the assembly were filled with distress, and melted into tears. The circumstances were such, as might have conveyed dejection even into a resolute mind, and would have totally overwhelmed the feeble. *They all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him; sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.* What were then the sentiments, what was the language, of this great and good man? Hear the words which spoke his firm and undaunted mind. *Behold, I go bound in the spirit, unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.** There was uttered the voice, there breathed the spirit, of a brave, and a virtuous man. Such a man knows not what it is to shrink from danger, when conscience points out his path. In that path he is determined to walk; let the consequences be what they will. *Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go. My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live †.* “For me there is a part appointed to act. I go to perform it. My duty I shall do to-day. Let to-morrow take thought for the things of itself.”—Having thus shown the importance, I proceed,

II. To show the proper foundations of constancy and fortitude of mind. They are principally two; a good conscience, and trust in God.

A corrupted and guilty man can possess no true firmness of heart. He, who, by crooked paths, pursues dishonourable ends, has many things to

* Acts xx. 22, 23, 24; 37, 38.

† Job xxvii. 5, 6.

dismay him. He not only dreads the disappointment of his designs, by some of those accidents to which all are exposed; but he has also to dread the treachery of his confederates, the discovery and reproach of the world, and the just displeasure of heaven. His fears he is obliged to conceal: but while he assumes the appearance of intrepidity before the world, he trembles within himself; and the bold and steady eye of integrity frequently darts terror into his heart. There is, it is true, a sort of constitutional courage, which sometimes has rendered men daring in the most flagitious attempts. But this fool-hardiness of the rash, this boldness of the ruffian, is altogether different from real fortitude. It arises merely from warmth of blood, from want of thought, and blindness to danger. As it forms no character of value, so it appears only in occasional sallies; and never can be uniformly maintained. It requires adventitious props to support it; and in some hour of trial, always fails. There can be no true courage, no regular persevering constancy, but what is connected with principle, and founded on a consciousness of rectitude of intention. This, and this only, erects that brazen wall, which we can oppose to every hostile attack. It clothes us with an armour, on which fortune will spend its shafts in vain. All is found within. There is no weak place, where we particularly dread a blow. There is no occasion for false colours to be hung out. No disguise is needed to cover us. We would be satisfied, if all mankind could look into our hearts. What has he to fear, who not only acts on a plan which his conscience approves, but who knows that every good man, nay, the whole unbiaffed world, if they could trace his intentions, would justify and approve his conduct?

He knows, at the same time, that he is acting under the immediate eye and protection of the Almighty. *Behold, my witness is in heaven; and my re-*

cord is on high *. Here opens a new source of fortitude to every virtuous man. The consciousness of such an illustrious spectator, invigorates and animates him. He trusts, that the eternal Lover of righteousness not only beholds and approves, but will strengthen and assist; will not suffer him to be unjustly oppressed, and will reward his constancy in the end, with glory, honour, and immortality. A good conscience, thus supported, bestows on the heart a much greater degree of intrepidity, than it could otherwise inspire. One, who rests on an Almighty, though invisible, Protector, exerts his powers with double force; acts with vigour not his own. Accordingly, it was from this principle of trust in God, that the psalmist derived that courage and boldness, which he expresses in the text. He had said immediately before, *The Lord is my light and my salvation; the Lord is the strength of my life.* The consequence, which directly follows, is, *of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.* It remains,

III. That I suggest a few considerations which may prove auxiliary to the exercise of virtuous fortitude in the midst of dangers.

From what was just now said, it appears, first, that it is of high importance to every one, who wishes to act his part with becoming resolution, to cultivate a religious principle, and to be inspired with trust in God.—The imperfections of the best are indeed so numerous, as to give them no title, to claim, on their own account, the protection of heaven. But we are taught to believe, that the merciful God who made us, and who *knows our frame*, favours the sincere and upright; that the supreme administration of the universe is always on the side of truth and virtue; and that, therefore, every worthy character, and every just and good cause, though for a while it should be depressed, is likely to receive countenance and protection in the end. The more

* Job xvi. 19.

firmly this belief is rooted in the heart, its influence will be more powerful, in surmounting the fears which arise from a sense of our own weakness or danger. The records of all nations afford a thousand remarkable instances of the effect of this principle, both on individuals, and on bodies of men. Animated by the strong belief of a just cause, and a protecting God, the *feeble have waxed strong*, and have despised dangers, sufferings, and death. Hundreds of men have defied *hosts that were encamped against them*; and have gone forth, conquering and to conquer. *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon*, have called forth a valour which astonished the world; and which could have been exerted by none, but those who fought under a divine banner.

In the next place, let him, who would preserve fortitude in difficult situations, fill his mind with a sense, of what constitutes the true honour of man. It consists not in the multitude of riches, or the elevation of rank; for experience shows, that these may be possessed by the worthless, as well as by the deserving. It consists, in being deterred by no danger, when duty calls us forth; in fulfilling our allotted part, whatever it may be, with faithfulness, bravery, and constancy of mind. These qualities never fail to stamp distinction on the character. They confer on him who discovers them, an honourable superiority, which all, even enemies, feel and revere. Let every man, therefore, when the hour of danger comes, bethink himself, that now is arrived the hour of trial—the hour which must determine, whether he is to rise, or to sink for ever, in the esteem of all around him. If, when put to the test, he discover no firmness to maintain his ground, no fortitude to stand a shock, he has forfeited every pretension to a manly mind. He must reckon on being exposed to general contempt: and what is worse, he will feel that he deserves it. In his own eyes he will be contemptible; than which, surely, no misery can be more severe.

But in order to acquire habits of fortitude, what is of the highest consequence is, to have formed a just estimate of the goods and evils of life, and of the value of life itself. For here lies the chief source of our weakness and pusillanimity. We overvalue the advantages of fortune; rank and riches, ease and safety. Deluded by vain opinions, we look to these as our ultimate goods. We hang upon them with fond attachment; and to forfeit any hope of advancement, to incur the least discredit with the world, or to be brought down but one step from the station we possess, is regarded with consternation and dismay. Hence, a thousand weights hang upon the mind, which depress its courage, and bend it to mean and dishonourable compliances. What fortitude can he possess, what worthy or generous purpose can he form, who conceives diminution of rank, or loss of fortune, to be the chief evils which man can suffer? Put these into the balance with true honour, with conscious integrity, with the esteem of the virtuous and the wise, with the favour of Almighty God, with peace of mind, and hope of heaven; and then think, whether those dreaded evils are sufficient to intimidate you from doing your duty. Look beyond external appearances to the inside of things. Suffer not yourselves to be imposed on by that glittering varnish, with which the surface of the world dazzles the vulgar. Consider how many are contented and happy without those advantages of fortune, on which you put so extravagant a value. Consider whether it is possible for you to be happy with them, if, for their sake, you forfeit all that is estimable in man. The favour of the great, perhaps, you think, is at stake; or that popularity with the multitude, on which you build plans of advancement. Alas! how precarious are the means which you employ in order to attain the end you have in view; and the end itself, how little is it worthy of your ambition? That favour which

you pursue, of dubious advantage when gained, is frequently lost by servile compliance. The timid and abject are detected and despised even by those whom they court; while the firm and resolute rise in the end to those honours, which the other pursued in vain.

Put the case at the worst. Suppose not your fortune only, but your safety, to be in hazard—your life itself to be endangered, by adhering to conscience and virtue. Think what a creeping and ignominious state you would render life, if, when your duty calls, you would expose it to no danger—if by a dastardly behaviour, you would, at any expense preserve it. That life, which you are so anxious to preserve, can at any rate be prolonged only for a few years more; and those years may be full of woe. He, who will not risk death, when conscience requires him to face it, ought to be ashamed to live. Consider, as a man and a christian, for what purpose life was given thee by heaven. Was it, that thou mightest pass a few years in low pleasures, and ignoble sloth—flying into every corner to hide thyself, when the least danger rises to view? No: life was given, that thou mightest come forth to act some useful and honourable part, on that theatre where thou hast been placed by Providence; mightest glorify him that made thee; and, by steady perseverance in virtue, rise in the end to an immortal state.

Son of man! Remember thine original honours. Assert the dignity of thy nature. Shake off this pusillanimous dread of death; and seek to fulfil the ends for which thou wert sent forth by thy Creator. The sentiment of a noble mind is, *I count not my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy. To the finishing of his course, let every one direct his eye:* and let him now appreciate life according to the value it will be found to have, when summed up at the close. That is the period which brings every

thing to the test. Illusions may formerly have imposed on the world; may have imposed on the man himself. But all illusion then vanishes. The real character comes forth. The estimate of happiness is fairly formed. Hence it has been justly said, that no man can be pronounced either great or happy, until his last hour come. To that last hour, what will bring such satisfaction, or add so much dignity, as the reflexion, on having surmounted with firmness all the discouragements of the world, and having persevered to the end, in one uniform course of fidelity and honour? We remarked before the magnanimous behaviour of the apostle Paul, when he had persecution and distress full in view. Hear now the sentiments of the same great man, when the time of his last suffering approached; and remark the majesty, and the ease, with which he looked on death. *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness* *. How many years of life does such a dying moment overbalance! Who would not choose, in this manner, to go off the stage, with such a song of triumph in his mouth, rather than prolong his existence through a wretched old age, stained with sin and shame?

Animated by these considerations, let us nourish that fortitude of mind, which is so essential to a man, and a christian. Let no discouragement, nor danger, deter us, from doing what is right. Through *honour and dishonour, through good report and bad report*, let us preserve fidelity to our God and our Saviour. *Though an host should encamp against us*, let us not fear to discharge our duty. God assists us in the virtuous conflict; and will crown the conqueror with eternal rewards. *Be thou faithful unto*

* 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7.

death, and I will give thee a crown of life. To him that overcometh, saith our blessed Lord, I will grant to sit with me on my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne*.

S E R M O N XXXVIII.

O N E N V Y.

I CORINTHIANS, xiii. 4.

Charity envieth not.

ENVY is a sensation of uneasiness and disquiet, arising from the advantages which others are supposed to possess above us, accompanied with malignity towards those who possess them. This is universally admitted to be one of the blackest passions in the human heart. In this world, we depend much on one another; and were therefore formed by God to be mutually useful and assisting. The instincts of kindness and compassion, which belong to our frame, show how much it was the intention of our Creator, that we should be united in friendship. If any infringe this great law of nature, by acts of causeless hostility, resentment may justly arise. No one is to be condemned for defending his rights, and showing displeasure against a malicious enemy. But to conceive ill-will at one who has attacked none of our rights, nor done us any injury, solely because he is more prosperous than we are, is a disposition altogether unnatural: it suits not the human constitution, and partakes more of the rancour of an evil spirit. Hence, the character of an envious man

* Rev. ii. 10.—iii. 21.

is universally odious. All disclaim it: and they, who feel themselves under the influence of this passion, carefully conceal it.

But it is proper to consider, that among all our passions, both good and bad, there are many different gradations. Sometimes they swim on the surface of the mind, without producing any internal agitation. They proceed no farther than the beginnings of passion. Allayed by our constitution, or tempered by the mixture of other dispositions, they exert no considerable influence on the temper. Though the character, in which envy forms the ruling passion, and reigns in all its force, be one too odious, I hope, to be common; yet some shade, some tincture, of this evil disposition, mixes with most characters in the world. It is, perhaps one of the most prevailing infirmities to which we are subject. There are few but who, at one time or other, have found somewhat of this nature stirring within them—some lurking uneasiness in their mind, when they looked up to others, who enjoyed a greater share than had fallen to their lot, of some advantages which they wished, and thought themselves entitled to possess. Though this should not embitter their disposition—though it should create the uneasiness only, without the malignity of envy—yet still it is a disturbed state of mind; and always borders upon, if it actually include not, some vicious affections. In order, as far as possible, to remedy this evil, I shall now consider what are the most general grounds of the envy which men are apt to bear to others; and shall examine what foundation they afford, for any degree of this troublesome and dangerous passion. The chief grounds of envy may be reduced to three: accomplishments of mind; advantages of birth, rank, and fortune; superior success in worldly pursuits.

I. Accomplishments or endowments of the mind. The chief endowment, for which man deserves to

be valued, is virtue. This, unquestionably, forms the most estimable distinction among mankind. Yet this, which may appear surprising, never forms any ground of envy. No man is envied for being more just, more generous, more patient, or forgiving, than others. This may, in part, be owing to virtue producing in every one who beholds it, that high degree of respect and love, which extinguishes envy. But probably, it is more owing to the good opinion which every one entertains of his own moral qualities. Some virtues, or, at least, the seeds of them, he finds within his breast. Others, he vainly attributes to himself. Those, in which he is plainly deficient, he undervalues, as either not real virtues, or virtues of very inferior rank; and rests satisfied, that, on the whole, he is as worthy and respectable as his neighbour.

The case is different, with regard to those mental abilities and powers which are ascribed to others. As long as these are exerted in a sphere of action remote from ours, and not brought into competition with talents of the same kind, to which we have pretensions, they create no jealousy. They are viewed as distant objects, in which we have not any concern. It is not until they touch our own line, and appear to rival us, in what we wish to excel, that they awaken envy. Even then, envy is, properly speaking, not grounded on the talents of others. For here, too, our self-complacency brings us relief; from the persuasion, that, were we thoroughly known, and full justice done to us, our abilities would be found not inferior to those of our rivals. What properly occasions envy, is the fruit of the accomplishments of others—the pre-eminence which the opinion of the world bestows, or which we dread it will bestow, on their talents, above ours. Hence, distinguished superiority in genius, learning, eloquence, or any other of those various arts that attract the notice of the world, often become pain-

ful grounds of envy—not indeed to all indifferently, but to those who follow the same line of pursuit. Mere rivalry, inspired by emulation, would carry no reproach; were not that rivalry joined with obliquity, and a malignant spirit; did it not lead to secret detraction, and unfair methods of diminishing the reputation of others. Too frequently has such a spirit tarnished the character of those who sought to shine in the elegant arts; and who, otherwise, had a just title to fame. Let such as are addicted to this infirmity, consider, how much they degrade themselves. Superior merit, of any kind, always rests on itself. Conscious of what it deserves, it disdains low competitions and jealousies. They, who are stung with envy, especially when they allow its malignity to appear, confess a sense of their own inferiority; and, in effect, pay homage to that merit, from which they endeavour to detract.

But in order to eradicate the passion, and to cure the disquiet which it creates, let such persons farther consider, how inconsiderable the advantage is, which their rivals have gained, by any superiority over them. They whom you envy, are themselves inferior to others who follow the same pursuits. For how few, how very few, have reached the summit of excellence, in the art or study which they cultivate! Even that degree of excellence, which they have attained, how seldom is it allowed to them by the world, till after they die! Public applause is the most fluctuating and uncertain, of all rewards. Admired, as they may be, by a circle of their friends, they have to look up to others, who stand above them in public opinion; and undergo the same mortifications which you suffer in looking up to them. Consider what labour it has cost them, to arrive at that degree of eminence they have gained; and after all their labour, how imperfect their recompence is at last. Within what narrow bounds is their fame confined? With what a number of hu-

miliations is it mixed? To how many are they absolutely unknown? Among those who know them, how many censure and decry them?—Attending fairly to these considerations, the envious might come, in the end, to discern, that the fame acquired by any accomplishment of the mind, by all that skill can contrive, or genius can execute, amounts to no more than a small elevation; raises the possessor to such an inconsiderable height above the crowd, that others may, without disquiet, sit down contented with their own mediocrity.

II. Advantages of fortune, superiority in birth, rank and riches, even qualifications of body and form, become grounds of envy. Among external advantages, those which relate to the body, ought certainly, in the comparative estimation of ourselves and others, to hold the lowest place; as in the acquisition of them we can claim no merit, but must ascribe them entirely to the gift of nature. Yet envy has often showed itself here in full malignity; though a small measure of reflexion might have discovered, that there was little or no ground for this passion to arise. It would have proved a blessing to multitudes, to have wanted those advantages for which they are envied. How frequently, for instance, has beauty betrayed the possessors of it into many a snare, and brought upon them many a disaster! Beheld with spiteful eyes by those who are their rivals, they, in the mean time, glow with no less envy against others by whom they are surpassed; while in the midst of their competitions, jealousies, and concealed enmities, the fading flower is easily blasted—short-lived at the best—and trifling, at any rate, in comparison with the higher, and more lasting beauties of the mind.

But of all the grounds of envy among men, superiority in rank and fortune is the most general. Hence, the malignity which the poor commonly bear to the rich, as engrossing to themselves all the

comforts of life. Hence, the evil eye, with which persons of inferior station scrutinise those who are above them in rank; and if they approach to that rank, their envy is generally strongest against such as are just one step higher than themselves. Alas! my friends, all this envious disquietude, which agitates the world, arises from a deceitful figure, which imposes on the public view. False colours are hung out: the real state of men is not what it seems to be. The order of society requires a distinction of ranks to take place: but in point of happiness, all men come much nearer to equality than is commonly imagined: and the circumstances, which form any material difference of happiness among them, are not of that nature, which renders them grounds of envy. The poor man possesses not, it is true, some of the conveniencies and pleasures of the rich: but in return, he is free of many embarrassments to which they are subject. By the simplicity and uniformity of his life, he is delivered from that variety of cares, which perplex those who have great affairs to manage, intricate plans to pursue, many enemies, perhaps, to encounter in the pursuit. In the tranquillity of his small habitation, and private family, he enjoys a peace which is often unknown at courts. The gratifications of nature, which are always the most satisfactory, are possessed by him to their full extent: and if he be a stranger to the refined pleasures of the wealthy, he is unacquainted, also, with the desire of them, and by consequence, feels no want. His plain meal satisfies his appetite, with a relish, probably, higher than that of the rich man, who sits down to his luxurious banquet. His sleep is more sound; his health more firm; he knows not what spleen, languor, or listlessness are. His accustomed employments or labours are not more oppressive to him, than the labour of attendance on courts and the great, the labours of dress, the fatigue of amuse-

ments, the very weight of idleness, frequently are to the rich. In the mean time, all the beauty of the face of nature, all the enjoyments of domestic society, all the gaiety and cheertulness of an easy mind, are as open to him as to those of the highest rank. The splendor of retinue, the sound of titles, the appearances of high respect, are indeed soothing, for a short time, to the great. But become familiar, they are soon forgotten. Custom effaces their impression. They sink into the rank of those ordinary things, which daily recur, without raising any sensation of joy. Cease, therefore, from looking up with discontent and envy, to those whom birth or fortune have placed above you. Adjust the balance of happiness fairly. When you think of the enjoyments you want, think also of the troubles from which you are free. Allow their just value to the comforts you possess: and you will find reason to rest satisfied, with a very moderate, though not an opulent and splendid, condition of fortune. Often did you know the whole, you would be inclined to pity the state of those whom you now envy.

III. Superior success in the course of worldly pursuits, is a frequent ground of envy. Among all ranks of men, competitions arise. Wherever any favourite object is pursued in common, jealousies seldom fail to take place among those who are equally desirous of attaining it; as in that ancient instance of envy, recorded of Joseph's brethren, who *hated their brother, because their father loved him more than all the rest**. "I could easily bear," says one, "that some others should be more reputable or famous, should be richer or greater, than I. It is but just that this man should enjoy the distinction to which his splendid abilities have raised him. It is natural for that man, to command the respect to which he is intitled by his birth or his rank.

* Gen. xxxvii, 4.

“ But when I, and another, have started in the race
“ of life, upon equal terms, and in the same rank ;
“ that he, without any pretension to uncommon
“ merit, should have suddenly so far out stripped me
“ —should have engrossed all that public favour to
“ which I am no less entitled than he—this is what
“ I cannot bear : my blood boils, my spirit swells
“ with indignation, at this undeserved treatment I
“ have suffered from the world.” Complaints of
this nature are often made, by those who seek to
justify the envy which they bear to their more pro-
sperous neighbours. But if such persons wish not
to be thought unjust, let me desire them to enquire
whether they have been altogether fair in the com-
parison they have made of their own merit with that
of their rivals ; and whether they have not them-
selves to blame, more than the world, for being left
behind in the career of fortune. The world is not
always blind or unjust in conferring its favours. In-
stances, indeed, sometimes occur, of deserving per-
sons prevented, by a succession of cross incidents,
from rising into public acceptance. But, in the or-
dinary course of things, merit, sooner or later, re-
ceives a reward ; while the greater part of men’s
misfortunes and disappointments can, generally, be
traced to some misconduct of their own. *Wisdom*
bringeth to honour : the hand of the diligent maketh rich ;
and, it has been said, not altogether without reason,
that, of his own fortune in life, every man is the
chief artificer. If Joseph was preferred by the fa-
ther to all his brethren, his subsequent conduct show-
ed how well he merited the preference.

Supposing, however, the world to have been un-
just, in an uncommon degree, with regard to you,
this will not vindicate malignity and envy towards a
more prosperous competitor. You may accuse the
world : but what reason have you to bear ill-will to
him, who has only improved the favour which the
world showed him ? If, by means that are unfair,

he has risen—and, to advance himself, has acted injuriously by you, resentment is justifiable: but if you cannot accuse him of any such improper conduct, his success alone gives no sanction to your envy. You, perhaps, preferred the enjoyment of your ease, to the stir of a busy, or to the cares of a thoughtful life. Retired from the world, and following your favourite inclinations, you were not always attentive to seize the opportunities which offered, for doing justice to your character, and improving your situation. Ought you then to complain, if the more active and laborious have acquired what you were negligent to gain? Consider, that if you have obtained less preferment, you have possessed more indulgence and ease. Consider, moreover, that the rival to whom you look up with repining eyes, though more fortunate in the world, may perhaps, on the whole, not be more happy than you. He has all the vicissitudes of the world before him. He may have much to encounter, much to suffer, from which you are protected by the greater obscurity of your station. Every situation of life has both a bright and a dark side. Let not your attention dwell only on what is bright on the side of those you envy, and dark on your own. But, bringing into view both sides of your respective conditions, estimate fairly the sum of felicity.

Thus I have suggested several considerations, for evincing the unreasonableness of that disquietude which envy raises in our breasts—considerations which tend at least to mitigate and allay the workings of this malignant passion, and which, in a sober mind, ought totally to extinguish it. The scope of the whole has been, to promote, in every one, contentment with his own state. Many arguments of a different nature may be employed against envy—some, taken from its sinful and criminal nature—some, from the mischiefs to which it gives rise in the world—others, from the misery which it produces

to him who nourishes this viper in his bosom. But, undoubtedly, the most efficacious arguments, are such as show, that the circumstances of others, compared with our own, afford no ground for envy. The mistaken ideas which are entertained, of the high importance of certain worldly advantages and distinctions, form the principal cause of our repining at our own lot, and envying that of others. To things light in themselves, our imagination has added undue weight. Did we allow reflexion and wisdom to correct the prejudices which we have imbibed, and to disperse those phantoms of our own creating, the gloom which overcasts us would gradually vanish. Together with returning contentment, the sky would clear up, and every object brighten around us. It is in the sullen and dark shade of discontent, that noxious passions, like venomous animals, breed, and prey upon the heart.

Envy is a passion of so odious a nature, that not only it is concealed as much as possible from the world, but every man is glad to dissemble the appearance of it to his own heart. Hence, it is apt to grow upon him unperceived. Let him, who is desirous to keep his heart chaste and pure from its influence, examine himself strictly on those dispositions which he bears towards his prosperous neighbours. Does he ever view, with secret uneasiness, the merit of others rising into notice and distinction? Does he hear their praises with unwilling ear? Does he feel an inclination to depreciate what he dares not openly blame? When obliged to commend, does his cold and awkward approbation insinuate his belief of some unknown defects in the applauded character? From such symptoms as these, he may infer that the disease of envy is forming; that the poison is beginning to spread its infection over his heart.

The causes, that nourish envy, are principally two—and two which, very frequently, operate in

conjunction; these are pride and idolence. The connexion of pride with envy, is obvious and direct. The high value, which the proud set on their own merit, the unreasonable claims which they form on the world, and the injustice which they suppose to be done to them by any preference given to others, are perpetual sources, first of discontent, and next of envy. When indolence is joined to pride, the disease of the mind becomes more inveterate and incurable. Pride leads men to claim more than they deserve. Indolence prevents them from obtaining what they might justly claim. Disappointments follow: and spleen, malignity, and envy, rage within them. The proud and indolent, are always envious. Wrapt up in their own importance, they sit still, and repine because others are more prosperous than they; while, with all their high opinion of themselves, they have done nothing either to deserve, or to acquire, prosperity. As, therefore, we value our virtue, or our peace, let us guard against these two evil dispositions of mind. Let us be modest in our own esteem, and, by diligence and industry, study to acquire the esteem of others. So shall we shut up the avenues that lead to many a bad passion; and shall learn, *in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content.*

Finally, in order to subdue envy, let us bring often into view those religious considerations, which regard us particularly as christians. Let us remember, how unworthy we all are in the sight of God; and how much the blessings, which each of us enjoy, are beyond what we deserve. Let us nourish reverence and submission to that Divine government, which has appointed to every one such a condition in the world, as is fittest for him to possess. Let us recollect how opposite the christian spirit is to envy; and what sacred obligations it lays upon us, to walk in love and charity towards one another. Indeed, when we reflect on the many miseries which

abound in human life—on the scanty proportion of happiness which any man is here allowed to enjoy—on the small difference which the diversity of fortune makes on that scanty proportion: it is surprising, that envy should ever have been a prevalent passion among men, much more that it should have prevailed among christians. Where so much is suffered in common, little room is left for envy. There is more occasion for pity, and sympathy, and inclination to assist each other. To our own good endeavours for rectifying our dispositions, let us not forget to add serious prayers to the Author of our being, that he, who made the heart of man, and knows all its infirmities, would thoroughly purify our hearts from a passion so base, and so criminal, as envy. *Create in me, O God, a clean heart; and renew a right spirit within me. Search me, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting* *.

S E R M O N XXXIX.

On IDLENESS.

MATTHEW, XX. 6.

Why stand ye here all the day idle?

IT is an observation, which naturally occurs, and has been often made, that all the representations of the christian life in scripture are taken from active scenes; from carrying on a warfare, running a race, striving to enter in at a strait gait, and, as in this context, labouring in a vineyard. Hence the con-

* Pf. li. 10; cxxxix. 23, 24.

clusion plainly follows, that various active duties are required of the christian; and that sloth and indolence are inconsistent with his hope of heaven.

But it has been sometimes supposed, that industry, as far as it is matter of duty, regards our spiritual concerns and employments only; and that one might be very busy as a christian, who was very idle as a man. Hence, among some denominations of christians, an opinion has prevailed, that the perfection of religion was to be found in those monastic retreats, where every active function of civil life was totally excluded, and the whole time of men filled up with exercises of devotion. They, who hold such opinions, proceed on the supposition, that religion has little or no concern with the ordinary affairs of the world; that its duties stand apart by themselves, and mingle not in the intercourse which men have with one another. The perfect christian was imagined to live a sort of angelic life, sequestered from the business or pleasures of this contemptible state. The gospel, on the contrary, represents the religion of Christ as intended for the benefit of human society. It assumes men as engaged in the business of active life; and directs its exhortations, accordingly, to all ranks and stations; to the magistrate and the subject, to the master and the servant, to the rich and the poor, to them that buy and them that sell, them *that use* and them *that abuse* the world. Some duties, indeed, require privacy and retreat. But the most important must be performed in the midst of the world, where we are commanded to *shine as lights*, and *by our good works to glorify our father which is in heaven*. This world, as the context represents it, is God's vineyard, where each of us has a task assigned him to perform. In every station, and at every period of life, labour is required. At the third, the sixth, or the eleventh hour, we are commanded to work, if we would not incur, from the great Lord of the vineyard,

this reproof, *Why stand ye here all the day idle?* We may, I confess, be busy about many things, and yet be found negligent of the *One thing needful*. We may be very active, and, withal, very ill employed. But though a person may be industrious, without being religious, I must at the same time admonish you, that no man can be idle without being sinful. This I shall endeavour to show in the sequel of the discourse; wherein I purpose to reprove a vice which is too common among all ranks of men. Superiors admonish their inferiors, and parents tell their children, that idleness is the mother of every sin; while, in their own practice, they often set the example of what they reprobate severely in others. I shall study to show, that the idle man is, in every view, both foolish, and criminal; that he neither lives to God—nor lives to the world—nor lives to himself.

I. He lives not to God. The great and wise Creator certainly does nothing in vain. A small measure of reflexion might convince every one, that for some useful purpose he was sent into the world. The nature of man bears no mark of insignificance or neglect. He is placed at the head of all things here below. He is furnished with a great preparation of faculties and powers. He is enlightened by reason with many important discoveries—even taught by revelation to consider himself as ransomed, by the death of Christ, from misery; and intended to rise, by gradual advances, to a still higher rank in the universe of God. In such a situation, thus distinguished, thus favoured and assisted by his Creator, can he hope to be forgiven, if he aim at no improvement, if he pursue no useful design, live for no other purpose but to indulge in sloth, to consume the fruits of the earth, and to spend his days in a dream of vanity? Existence is a sacred trust: and he, who thus misemploys, and squanders it away, is treacherous to its Author. Look around you, and you

will behold the whole universe full of active powers. Action is, to speak so, the genius of nature. By motion and exertion, the system of being is preserved in vigour. By its different parts always acting in subordination one to another, the perfection of the whole is carried on. The heavenly bodies perpetually revolve. Day and night incessantly repeat their appointed course. Continual operations are going on in the earth, and in the waters. Nothing stands still. All is alive, and stirring, throughout the universe.—In the midst of this animated and busy scene, is man alone to remain idle in his place? Belongs it to him, to be the sole inactive and slothful being in the creation, when he has so much allotted him to do—when in so many various ways he might improve his own nature, might advance the glory of the God who made him—and contribute his part to the general good?

Hardly is there any feeling of the human heart more natural, or more universal, than that of our being accountable to God. It is, what the most profligate can never totally erase. Almost all nations have agreed in the belief, that there is to come some period, when the Almighty will act as the judge of his creatures. Presentiments of this, work in every breast. Conscience has already erected a tribunal, on which it anticipates the sentence which at that period shall be passed. Before this tribunal let us sometimes place ourselves in serious thought, and consider what account we are prepared to give of our conduct to Him who made us. “I placed
“you,” the great Judge may then be supposed to say,
“in a station where you had many occasions for
“action, and many opportunities of improvement.
“You were taught, and you knew, your duty.
“Throughout a course of years I continued your
“life. I surrounded you with friends, to whom
“you might be useful. I gave you health, ease,
“leisure, and various advantages of situation.

“ Where are the fruits of those talents which you
 “ possessed? What good have you done with them
 “ to yourselves? what good to others? How have
 “ you filled up your place, or answered your desti-
 “ nation, in the world? Produce some evidence, of
 “ your not having existed altogether in vain?” Let
 such as are now mere blanks in the world, and a
 burden to the earth, think what answer they will
 give to those awful questions.

II. The idle live not to the world, and their fel-
 low-creatures around them, any more than they do
 to God. Had any man a title to stand alone, and
 to be independent of his fellows, he might then
 consider himself as at liberty to indulge in solitary
 ease and sloth, without being responsible to others
 for the manner in which he chose to live. But, on
 the face of the earth, there is no such person, from
 the king on his throne, to the beggar in his cottage.
 We are all connected with one another, by various
 relations; which create a chain of mutual depen-
 dence, reaching from the highest to the lowest sta-
 tion in society. The order and happiness of the
 world cannot be maintained, without a perpetual
 circulation of active duties and offices, which all are
 called upon to perform in their turn. Superiors are
 no more independent of their inferiors, than these
 inferiors are of them. Each have demands and
 claims upon the other: and he, who in any situati-
 on of life, refuses to act his part, and to contribute
 his share to the general stock of felicity, deserves
 to be proscribed from society, as an unworthy mem-
 ber. *If any man will not work, says the Apostle
 Paul, neither shall he eat**. If he will do nothing to
 advance the purposes of society, he has no title to
 enjoy the advantages of it.

It is sometimes supposed, that industry and dili-
 gence are duties required of the poor alone, and
 that riches confer the privilege of being idle. This

* 2 Thess. iii. 10.

is so far from being justified by reason, how often soever it may obtain in fact, that the higher one is raised in the world, his obligation to be useful is proportionably increased. The claims upon him, from various quarters, multiply. The sphere of his active duties widens on every hand. Even supposing him exempted from exerting himself in behalf of his inferiors, supposing the relation between superiors and inferiors abolished, the relation among equals must still subsist. If there be no man, however high in rank, who stands not frequently in need of the good offices of his friends, does he think that he owes nothing to them in return? Can he fold his arms in selfish indolence, and expect to be served by others, if he will not exert himself, in doing service to any?—Were there no other call to industry, but the relation, in which every one stands to his own family, the remembrance of this alone, should make the man of idleness blush. Pretends he to love those with whom he is connected by the dearest ties, and yet will he not bestir himself for their guidance, their support, or their advancement in the world? How immoral and cruel is the part he acts, who slumbers in sensual ease, while the wants and demands of a helpless family cry aloud, but cry in vain, for his vigorous exertions! Is this a husband, is this a father, that deserves to be honoured with those sacred names? How many voices will be lifted up against him, at the last day! Let such persons remember the awful words of scripture, and tremble. It is written in the First Epistle to Timothy, the fifth chapter, and eighth verse, *If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

III. The idle man lives not to himself, with any more advantage, than he lives to the world. It is indeed on a supposition entirely opposite, that persons of this character proceed. They imagine,

that, how deficient soever they may be in point of duty, they at least consult their own satisfaction. They leave to others the drudgery of life; and betake themselves, as they think, to the quarter of enjoyment and ease. Now, in contradiction to this, I assert, and hope to prove, first, that the idle man shuts the door against all improvement; next, that he opens it wide to every destructive folly; and lastly, that he excludes himself from the true enjoyment of pleasure.

First, He shuts the door against improvement of every kind, whether of mind, body, or fortune. The law of our nature, the condition under which we were placed from our birth, is, that nothing good or great is to be acquired, without toil and industry. A price is appointed by providence to be paid for every thing; and the price of improvement, is labour. Industry may, indeed, be sometimes disappointed. *The race may not be always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.* But, at the same time, it is certain, that, in the ordinary course of things, without strength, the battle cannot be gained; without swiftness, the race cannot be run with success. *In all labour, says the wise man, there is profit; but the soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing*.* If we consult either the improvement of the mind, or the health of the body, it is well known, that exercise is the great instrument of promoting both. Sloth enfeebles equally the bodily, and the mental powers. As in the animal system, it engenders disease; so on the faculties of the soul it brings a fatal rust, which corrodes and wastes them; which, in a short time, reduces the brightest genius to the same level with the meanest understanding. The great differences which take place among men, are not owing to a distinction that nature has made in their original powers, so much as to the superior diligence with which some have improved these powers be-

* Prov. xiv. 23. xiii. 4.

yond others. To no purpose do we possess the seeds of many great abilities, if they are suffered to lie dormant within us. It is not the latent possession, but the active exertion of them, which gives them merit. Thousands, whom indolence has sunk into contemptible obscurity, might have come forward to the highest distinction, if idleness had not frustrated the effect of all their powers.

Instead of going on to improvement, all things go to decline, with the idle man. His character falls into contempt. His fortune is consumed. Disorder, confusion, and embarrassment, mark his whole situation. Observe in what lively colours the state of his affairs is described by Solomon. *I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. And lo! it was all grown over with thorns; and nettles had covered the face thereof; and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well. I looked upon it, and received instruction**. In the midst, too, of those distresses which idleness brings on its votaries, they must submit to innumerable mortifications, which never fail to attend their shameful conduct. They must reckon, on seeing themselves contemned by the virtuous and wise, and slighted by the thriving part of mankind. They must expect to be left behind by every competitor for rank or fortune. They will be obliged to humble themselves before persons, now far their superiors in the world, whom, once, they would have disdained to acknowledge as their equals. It is in this manner, that a man lives to himself? Are these the advantages, which were expected to be found in the lap of ease? The down may at first have appeared soft: but it will soon be found to cover thorns innumerable. *How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep—yet a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that tra-*

* Prov. xxiv. 30, 31, 32.

welleth ; and thy want as an armed man *. But this is only a small part of the evils which persons of this description bring on themselves : For,

In the second place, while in this manner they shut the door against every improvement, they open it wide to the most destructive vices and follies. The human mind cannot remain always unemployed. Its passions must have some exercise. If we supply them not with proper employment, they are sure to run loose into riot and disorder. While we are unoccupied by what is good, evil is continually at hand : and hence it is said in scripture, that as soon as Satan found the house empty, he took possession, and filled it with evil spirits †. Every man who recollects his conduct, may be satisfied, that his hours of idleness have always proved the hours most dangerous to virtue. It was then, that criminal desires arose ; guilty pursuits were suggested ; and designs were formed, which in their issue, have disquieted and embittered his whole life. If seasons of idleness be dangerous, what must a continued habit of it prove ? Habitual indolence, by a silent and secret progress, undermines every virtue in the soul. More violent passions run their course, and terminate. They are like rapid torrents, which foam, and swell, and bear down every thing before them. But, after having overflowed their banks, their impetuosity subsides. They return, by degrees, into their natural channel : and the damage which they have done, can be repaired. Sloth is like the slowly-flowing, putrid stream, which stagnates in the marsh, breeds venomous animals, and poisonous plants ; and infects with pestilential vapours the whole country round it. Having once tainted the soul, it leaves no part of it sound ; and at the same time, gives not those alarms to conscience, which the eruptions of bolder and fiercer emotions often occasion. The disease,

* Prov. xxiv. 33, 34.

† Matth. xii. 44.

which it brings on, is creeping and insidious ; and is, on that account, more certainly mortal.

One constant effect of idleness, is to nourish the passions, and, of course, to heighten our demands for gratification ; while it unhappily withdraws from us the proper means of gratifying these demands. If the desires of the industrious man be set upon opulence or rank, upon the conveniencies, or the splendor of life, he can accomplish his desires, by methods which are fair and allowable. The idle man has the same desires with the industrious, but not the same resources for compassing his ends by honourable means. He must therefore turn himself to seek by fraud, or by violence, what he cannot submit to acquire by industry. Hence, the origin of those multiplied crimes to which idleness is daily giving birth in the world ; and which contribute so much to violate the order, and to disturb the peace, of society. In general, the children of idleness may be ranked under two denominations or classes of men ; both of whom may, too justly, be termed, the children of the devil. Either incapable of any effort, they are such as sink into absolute meanness of character, and contentedly wallow with the drunkard and debauchee, among the herd of the sensual ; until poverty overtake them, or disease cut them off : or, they are such as, retaining some remains of vigour, are impelled, by their passions, to venture on a desperate attempt for retrieving their ruined fortunes. In this case, they employ the art of the fraudulent gamester to ensnare the unwary. They issue forth with the highwayman to plunder on the road : or, with the thief and the robber, they infest the city by night. From this class, our prisons are peopled : and by them the scaffold is furnished with those melancholy admonitions, which are so often delivered from it to the crowd. Such are frequently the tragical, but

well known, consequences of the vice against which I now warn you.

In the third, and last place, how dangerous soever idleness may be to virtue, are there not pleasures, it may be said, which attend it? Is there not ground to plead, that it brings a release from the oppressive cares of the world; and soothes the mind with a gentle satisfaction, which is not to be found amidst the toils of a busy and active life? This is an advantage which, least of all others, we admit it to possess. In behalf of incessant labour, no man contends. Occasional release from toil, and indulgence of ease, is what nature demands, and virtue allows. But what we assert is, that nothing is so great an enemy to the lively and spirited enjoyment of life, as a relaxed and indolent habit of mind. He, who knows not what it is to labour, knows not what it is to enjoy rest. The felicity of human life, depends on the regular prosecution of some laudable purpose or object, which keeps awake and enlivens all our powers. Our happiness consists in the pursuit, much more than in the attainment, of any temporal good. Rest is agreeable; but it is only from preceding labours, that rest acquires its true relish. When the mind is suffered to remain in continued inaction, all its powers decay. It soon languishes and sickens: and the pleasures, which it proposed to obtain from rest, end in tediousness and insipidity. To this, let that miserable set of men bear witness, who, after spending great part of their life in active industry, have retired to what they fancied was to be a pleasing enjoyment of themselves, in wealthy inactivity, and profound repose. Where they expected to find an elysium, they have found nothing but a dreary and comfortless waste. Their days have dragged on, in uniform languor; with the melancholy remembrance often returning, of the cheerful hours they passed, when they were

engaged in the honest business, and labours of the world.

We appeal to every one who has the least knowledge or observation of life, whether the busy, or the idle, have the most agreeable enjoyment of themselves? Compare them in their families. Compare them in the societies with which they mingle: and remark, which of them discover most cheerfulness and gaiety; which possess the most regular flow of spirits; whose temper is most equal; whose good humour, most unclouded. While the active and diligent both enliven, and enjoy, society, the idle are not only a burden to themselves, but a burden to those with whom they are connected; a nuisance to all whom they oppress with their company. On whom does time hang so heavy, as on the slothful and lazy? To whom are the hours so lingering? Who are so often devoured with spleen, and obliged to fly to every expedient which can help them to get rid of themselves? Instead of producing tranquillity, indolence produces a fretful restlessness of mind; gives rise to cravings which are never satisfied; nourishes a sickly effeminate delicacy, which sours and corrupts every pleasure.

Enough has now been said, to convince every thinking person, of the folly, the guilt, and the misery, of an idle state. Let these admonitions stir us up, to exert ourselves in our different occupations, with that virtuous activity which becomes men and christians. Let us arise from the bed of sloth; distribute our time with attention and care; and improve to advantage the opportunities, which Providence has bestowed. The material business, in which our several stations engage us, may often prove not sufficient to occupy the whole of our time and attention. In the life even of busy men, there are frequent intervals of leisure. Let them take care, that into these, none of the vices of idleness creep.

Let some secondary, some subsidiary employment, of a fair and laudable kind, be always at hand, to fill up those vacant spaces of life, which too many assign, either to corrupting amusements, or to mere inaction. We ought never to forget, that entire idleness always borders, either on misery, or on guilt.

At the same time, let the course of our employments be ordered in such a manner, that in carrying them on, we may be also promoting our eternal interest. With the business of the world, let us properly intermix the exercises of devotion. By religious duties; and virtuous actions, let us study to prepare ourselves for a better world. In the midst of our labours for this life, it is never to be forgotten, that we must *first seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*; and *give diligence to make our calling and election sure*. Otherwise, how active soever we may seem to be, our whole activity will prove only a laborious idleness: we shall appear, in the end, to have been busy to no purpose, or to a purpose worse than none. Then, only, we fulfil the proper character of christians, when we join that pious zeal which becomes us as the servants of God, with that industry which is required of us, as good members of society—when, according to the exhortation of the apostle, we are found *not slothful in business, and, at the same time, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord* *.

* Rom. xii. 11.

S E R M O N XL.

On the SENSE of the DIVINE PRESENCE.



PSALM, lxxiii. 23.

I am continually with thee.

WE live in a world which is full of divine presence and power. We behold every where around us the traces of that supreme goodness, which enlivens and supports the universe. *Day uttereth speech of it to-day; and night showeth knowledge of it to-night.* Yet, surrounded as we are with the perfections of God, meeting him wherever we go, and called upon by a thousand objects, to confess his presence, it is both the misfortune and the crime of a great part of mankind, that they are strangers to him, in whose world they dwell. Occupied with nothing but their pursuits of interest and pleasure, they pass through this world, as though God were not there. The virtuous and reflecting are particularly distinguished from the giddy and dissolute, by that habitual sense of the divine presence which characterises the former. To them, nothing appears void of God. They contemplate his perfections in the works of nature: and they trace his providence in the incidents of life. When retired from the world, he often employs their meditation. When engaged in action, he always influences their conduct. Wherever a pious man is, or whatever he does, in the style of the text, he is *continually with God.*

The happy effect of this sentiment on the heart, is fully displayed in the context. We see it allaying all the disquiet, which the psalmist, in the

preceding verses, describes himself to have suffered, on account of the prosperity of the wicked. The first reflexion, which restored tranquillity to his mind, was the remembrance of the presence of God. *Nevertheless, I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand.* He became sensible, that whatever distresses the righteous might suffer for a time, they could not fail of being compensated in the end, by that Almighty Protector, whose propitious presence ever continued to surround them. Whereupon follow those memorable expressions of his trust and joy in God. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel; and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee.*

There are principally two effects, which the sense of the divine presence is fitted to produce upon men.—One is, to restrain them from vice; the other, to encourage their virtue. Its operation, as a check upon the sinner, is obvious. The perpetual presence of so powerful and venerable a witness, is one of the most awful considerations which can be addressed to the dissolute. It removes all the security which secrecy can be supposed to give to crimes. It aggravates the guilt of them, from being committed in face of the Almighty; and has power to strike terror into the heart of the greatest criminal, in the midst of his misdeeds. While this principle of religion thus checks and terrifies the sinner, it produces also another effect, that of strengthening and comforting the good man, in the practice of his duty: It is the influence of the divine presence on good men, which, in consequence of the psalmist's sentiment, I purpose to consider. To their character, it belongs to *be continually with God.* I shall endeavour to show the high benefit and comfort which they derive from such a habit of mind; and shall, for this end, first consider their internal moral state; and next, view them as they

are affected by several of the external accidents and situations of life.

Let us begin with considering them in their internal state. The belief of divine presence acts upon them here, first, as an incitement to virtue. The presence of one, whom we highly esteem and revere, of a sovereign, for instance, a father, or a friend, whose approbation we are solicitous to gain, is always found to exalt the powers of men, to refine and improve their behaviour. Hence, it has been given as a rule by ancient moralists, that, in order to excel in virtue, we should propound to ourselves some person of eminent and distinguished worth; and should accustom ourselves to act, as if he were standing by, and beholding us. To the esteem and approbation of their fellow creatures, none are insensible. There are few who, in the conspicuous parts of their life, when they know the eyes of the public to be fixed on them, act not their part with propriety and decorum. But what is the observation of the public, what is the presence of the greatest or wisest man on earth, to that presence of the Divinity which constantly surrounds us? The man, who realises to his mind this august presence, feels a constant incentive for acquitting himself with dignity. He views himself as placed on an illustrious theatre. To have the Almighty for the spectator and witness of his conduct, is more to him, than if the whole world were assembled to observe him. Men judge often falsely, always imperfectly, of what passes before them. They are imposed on by specious appearances: and the artful carry away the praise which is due to the deserving. Even supposing them to judge fairly, we may want the opportunity of doing justice to our character, by any proper display of it in the sight of the world. Our situation may bury in obscurity, those talents and virtues which were entitled to command the highest esteem. But he, in whose presence the

good man acts, is both an impartial and an unerring judge of worth. No fallacious appearances impose on him. No secret virtue is hidden from him. He is attentive equally to the meanest and the greatest: and his approbation confers eternal rewards. The man, therefore, who *sets the Lord always before him*, is prompted to excel in virtue, by motives, which are peculiar to himself, and which engage, on the side of duty, both honour and interest. *I have kept thy precepts, and thy testimonies; for all my ways are before thee* *.

Supposing, however, his virtuous endeavours to be faithful, many imperfections will attend them. A faultless tenor of unblemished life, is beyond the reach of man. Passions will sometimes overcome him: and ambition or interest, in an unguarded hour, will turn him aside into evil. Hence, he will be ashamed of himself, and disquieted by a sense of guilt and folly. In this state, to which we are often reduced by the weakness of human nature, the belief of God's continual presence brings relief to the heart. It acted before as an animating principle. It now acts as a principle of comfort. In the midst of many imperfections, a virtuous man appeals to his divine witness, for the sincerity of his intentions. He can appeal to him who *knows his frame*, that in the general train of his conduct, it is his study to keep the law of God.

Mere law, among men, is rigid and inflexible. As no human lawgiver can look into the hearts of his subjects, he cannot, even though he were ever present with them, estimate their character exactly. He can make no allowance for particular situations. He must prescribe the same terms to all whom he rules; and treat all alike, according to their outward actions. But every minute diversity of character, temper, and situation, is known to God. It is not only from what his servants do, but from

* Psalm. cxix. 168.

what they seek to do, that he forms his judgment of them. He attends to all those circumstances, which render the trial of their virtue, at any time, peculiarly hard. He hears the whisper of devotion, as it rises in the soul. He beholds the tear of contrition which falls in secret. He sees the good intention struggling in its birth; and pursues it, in its progress, through those various obstacles which may prevent it from ripening into action. Good men, therefore, in their most humbled and dejected state, draw some consolation from his knowledge of their heart. Though they may sometimes have erred from the right path, they can look up to him who is ever with them, and say, as an apostle, who had grievously offended, once said to his great master: *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee* *.

Appealing thus to their omniscient witness, they are naturally soothed and encouraged by the hope of his clemency. At the same time, it is the peculiar advantage of this sentiment of the divine presence, that it prevents such hope from flattering them too much, or rising into undue presumption. For while it encourages, it tends also to humble, a pious man. If it encourages him, by the reflexion on all his good dispositions being known and attended to by God, it humbles him, by the remembrance, that *his secret sins also are ever in the light of the divine countenance*. So that, by dwelling under the sense of God being continually with us, we keep alive the proper temper of a christian in the soul; humility, without dejection; fear, mingled with hope. We are cheered, without being lifted up. We feel ourselves obnoxious to the all-observing eye of justice; but are comforted with the thoughts of that mercy, which, through Jesus Christ, the Discerner of all hearts holds forth to the sincere and penitent. Such are the blessed effects which this

* John, xxi. 17.

principle of religion produces upon the inward moral state of a good man. Let us now,

In the second place, consider his external circumstances; and examine the influence, which the same principle has upon his happiness, in several different situations of life.

Let us first view him in what the world calls prosperity—when his circumstances are easy or affluent, and his life flows in a smooth, untroubled stream. Here, it might be thought, that a sense of the divine presence could operate upon him only, or chiefly, for promoting temperance, and restraining the disorders incident to a prosperous state. Valuable effects, indeed, these are, and most conducive to the true enjoyment of all that is agreeable in life. But though it, doubtless, does exert this salutary influence, yet it stops not there. It not only preserves the virtue of a good man amidst the temptations of pleasure, but it gives to his prosperity a security and a peculiar relish, which to others is unknown. He, who is without a sense of God upon his mind, beholds in human affairs nothing but a perpetual fluctuation and vicissitude of events. He is surrounded with unknown causes, which may be working his destruction in secret. He cannot avoid perceiving, that there hangs over him the irresistible arm of that Providence, whose displeasure he has done nothing to stay or avert. But he, who, in the day of prosperity, dwells with God, is delivered from those disquieting alarms. He dwells as with a friend and protector, from whom he conceives his blessings to proceed. He can appeal to him for the thankfulness with which he receives them—and for his endeavours to employ them well. He trusts, that the God whom he serves will not forsake him; that the goodness which he has already experienced, will continue to bless him: and though he believes himself not exempted from the changes of the world, yet, in the midst of these,

he has ground to hope, that sources of comfort and happiness shall always be left open to him.

Moreover, the pleasures of life, while they last, are unspeakably heightened by the presence of that Benefactor who bestows them. The pleasing emotion of gratitude to the giver, mingles with the enjoyment of the gift. While to the mere worldly man, the whole frame of nature is only a vast irregular fabric—and the course of human affairs no more than a confused succession of fortuitous events—all nature is beautified, and every agreeable incident is enlivened, to him who beholds God in all things. Hence arise a variety of pleasing sensations, to fill up those solitary hours, in which external prosperity supplies him with no entertainment. In the smiling scenes of nature, he contemplates the benignity of its Author. In its sublime objects, he admires his majesty. In its awful and terrible ones, he adores his power. He dwells in this world as in a magnificent temple, which is full of the glory of its founder; and every where views nature offering up its incense to him, from a thousand altars. Such ideas exalt and ennoble the human mind; and reflect an additional lustre on the brightness of prosperity.

From the prosperous, let us next turn to the afflicted condition of a good man. For, as prosperity may, affliction certainly will, at one time or other, be his lot. It enters into the appointed trial of his virtue; and, in one degree or other, is the doom of all. Here we shall find various situations occur, in which no relief is equal to what a virtuous and holy man derives from a sense of the perpetual presence of God.

Is he, for instance, thrown into an obscure condition in the world, without friends to assist him, or any to regard and consider his state? He enjoys the satisfaction of thinking, that though he may be neglected by men, he is not forgotten by God. Inconsiderable as he is in himself, he knows, that he

will not be overlooked by the Almighty, amidst the infinite variety of being, or lost in the immensity of his works. The poor man can, with as much encouragement as the rich or great, lift up his eyes to heaven, and say, *Nevertheless, O Lord, I am continually with thee : thou holdest me by my right hand.* The gracious presence of that Supreme Being is affected by no diversity of rank or fortune. It imparts itself alike to all the virtuous and upright—like its glorious image, the sun in the firmament, which sheds its rays equally upon the humble cottage, and upon the palace of kings. In the presence of the great Lord of heaven and earth, all the distinctions, which vanity has contrived to make among men, totally disappear. All ranks are on one level. *The rich and the poor* here indeed *meet together*, without any other distinction than what arises from the heart and the soul. The sense of this, lifts the poor man above contempt; supports his spirits, when apt to be dejected; and bestows dignity on the part which he acts. How inconsiderable soever that part may appear, in the estimation of an injudicious world, it is ennobled, when virtuously performed, by the approbation of his divine witness. He can bear with indifference the scorn of the proud, as long as he knows, that there is one higher than the highest, to regard him. He can enjoy himself with pleasure in his mean habitation, because he believes that God dwells within him there. The Divine presence cheers to him the most lonely retreat. It accompanies his steps to the most distant regions of the earth. If he should be driven into exile from all his friends, and obliged to *dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea*, even there *God's hand would hold him, and his right hand would guide him.* Though left without companion or friend, he never thinks himself desolate, as long as he can say, *I am still with God.*

But, though raised above obscurity or poverty, yet, in any situation of fortune, calumny and re-

proach may be the lot of the servant of God. His good intentions may be misconstrued—his character unjustly traduced—and, to the open reviling of enemies, the more bitter unkindness of friends may sometimes be joined. In this situation, when wounded in spirit, and, perhaps, unable to make his innocence appear, to whom shall he have recourse for defence, to whom make his last appeal, but to that God who is ever present with him, and who knoweth his heart? How frequently, amidst the injustice and oppression of the world, has distressed innocence had no other relief but this! “God is my witness. God is my avenger. He hath seen it; and he will repay.” A good conscience, it is true, is, of itself, a powerful support. But God is Lord of the conscience; and it is only when connected with a sense of divine presence and approbation, that a good conscience becomes a steady principle of fortitude in the mind, under all discouragements. Hence, a virtuous man possesses a high degree of independence, both on the praise and on the censure of the world. It is enough to him, if, when undergoing the same reproaches which Job suffered from his mistaken friends, he can say with him, *Behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high**. He affects not to divulge his good deeds to the world. He is without concern whether the world be acquainted with them, or not. He knoweth, that his *Father, which is in heaven, seeth in secret*; and that his *prayers and his alms come up in grateful memorial before him. With me, it is a small thing to be judged of you, or of man’s judgment; he, that judgeth me, is the Lord*†. He shall bring forth my righteousness, at last, *as the light, and my judgment as the noon day*. In this consciousness of integrity, he looks down with indifference, as from a superior station, upon the harsh censures of a giddy and ignorant world. The

* Job. xvi. 19.

† 1 Cor. iv. 3. 4.

sense of being continually with God diffuses over his soul a holy calm, which unjust reproach cannot disturb. In the presence of that august and venerable witness, all the noise and clamours of men, like the murmurings of a distant storm, die away.

Lastly, Supposing the character of a good man to be untainted by reproach, supposing also his external situation to be opulent or distinguished, many, notwithstanding, and severe, are the distresses to which he may be exposed. Secret griefs may be preying upon him—and his heart left to feed in silence on its own bitterness. He may labour under sore disease, and discern his earthly frame gradually mouldering into dust. He may be deprived of those friends and relatives who had been the chief comforts of his station; or may be obliged to prepare himself for taking farwel of them for ever. In the midst of these various afflicting scenes of human life, no consolation can be more powerful, than what arises from the presence of a divine Protector and Guardian, to whom our case, with all its sorrows, is perfectly known. *To him, says the psalmist, I poured out my complaint. I showed before him my trouble. I looked on my right hand, and viewed: but behold, there was no man who cared for my soul. I said unto thee, O Lord, thou art my refuge. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path* *.

We all know, that to communicate our grief to a faithful friend, often gives ease and relief to the burdened heart. Such communication we are encouraged to make, and such relief we may expect to find, in pouring out our heart before that God, *in whom compassions flow.* We may have no earthly friend, to whom we can with full confidence disclose all our sorrows; or we may want words, in which to express them. But God is the searcher of all hearts; and the hearer of all prayers. To

* Psalm cxlii. 2. 3. 4.

the secret anguish of the soul, he is no inattentive witness. Every groan, which is heaved from the labouring bosom, though heard by no human ear, reaches his throne. As he *knows our frame*, so he *remembers we are dust*; and thence *light arises to the upright in darkness*. For the hope naturally springs that this beneficent being will pity them, *as a father pitieth his children*; and in the midst of those distresses, which the present circumstances of man render unavoidable, will *send them help from his sanctuary*. Surrounded with this compassionate presence of the Almighty, good men never view themselves as left in this vale of tears, to bear, solitary and alone, the whole weight of human woe. In their darkness, as well as in their brighter hours, God is with them. Even in that valley of the shadow of death, where no friend, no comforter can go along to aid them, he is with them still. In the last extremity of nature, *the rod and staff of the Shepherd of Israel support them*.

Thus I have shown, though in an imperfect manner, what benefits holy men derive from an habitual sense of the divine presence. It animates and strengthens their virtue. It enlivens and brightens their prosperity.—Under various forms of adversity, it affords them consolation and relief. Such considerations, undoubtedly, form a strong argument in favour of a devout spirit, and a virtuous life. But they are considerations which may, probably, be regarded by some, as ideal and visionary—requiring aid from a heated or enthusiastic fancy, in order to give them force. I readily admit, that amidst the hurry and turbulence of the world, it may be difficult to bring these religious sentiments as fully into view, as is necessary for their making a just impression on the soul. This requires the effort of an intelligent and feeling mind; and therefore cannot be expected to be commonly found. To the unreflecting crowd, nothing appears real, but what is expos-

ed to sense. What is invisible, is the same to them, as if it had no existence. But by the grossness of their own conceptions, they have no title to measure those of others. While they affect to treat all considerations, taken from the sense of the divine presence, as visionary and enthusiastic, it can, on the contrary, be clearly shown, that they are founded on the most certain and unquestionable principles of reason. They essentially belong not to revealed only, but to natural religion. Their reality can be denied by none, but those who deny that God exists, or that he governs the world. For, if he exist, he must undoubtedly pervade and inspect the world which he governs. He must know what is going on throughout his own universe; and especially must know what passes within the hearts which he has made, and of which he is to judge. To be every where present, is the attribute of his nature, which, of all others, is the most necessary to his administration of the universe. This, accordingly, is an attribute which all religions have ascribed to him. All nations have believed in it. All societies appeal to it, in the solemnities of an oath, by which they determine controversies. This attribute being once admitted to belong to the Deity, the consequences, which I have deduced from it, plainly and naturally follow: and every good man has ground to say, *O Lord, I am continually with thee.*

S E R M O N XLI.

On PATIENCE.



LUKE, xxi. 19.

In your patience possess ye your souls.

THE *possession of our souls* is a very emphatical expression. It describes that state in which a man has both the full command, and the undisturbed enjoyment of himself—in opposition to his undergoing some inward agitation which discomposes his powers. Upon the least reflexion, it must appear, how essential such a state of mind is to happiness. He only, who thus *possesses his soul*, is capable of possessing any other thing with advantage: and in order to attain and preserve this self-possession, the most important requisite is, the habitual exercise of patience.

I know, that patience is apt to be ranked by many, among the more humble and obscure virtues—belonging chiefly to those who groan on a sick-bed, or who languish in a prison. If their situation be, happily, of a different kind, they imagine that there is no occasion for the discipline of patience being preached to them. But I hope to make it appear, that, in every circumstance of life, no virtue is more important, both to duty and to happiness—or more requisite for forming a manly and worthy character. It is not confined to a situation of continued adversity. It principally, indeed, regards the disagreeable circumstances which are apt to occur. But, in our present state, the occurrence of these is so frequent, that in every condition of life, patience is incessantly called forth. Prosperity can-

not be enjoyed, any more than adversity supported, without it. It must enter into the temper, and form the habit of the soul, if we would pass through the world with tranquillity and honour. What I purpose is, to point out some of the chief occasions on which patience is required; and to recommend and enforce the exercise of it, in order to *our possessing our souls*.

I. Patience under provocations. The wide circle of human society is diversified by an endless variety of characters, dispositions, and passions. Uniformity is, in no respect, the genius of the world. Every man is marked by some peculiarity which distinguishes him from another: and no where can two individuals be found, who are exactly, and in all respects, alike. Where so much diversity obtains, it cannot but happen, that, in the intercourse, which men are obliged to maintain, their tempers shall often be ill adjusted to that intercourse; shall jar, and interfere with each other. Hence, in every station, the highest as well as the lowest, and in every condition of life, public, private, and domestic, occasions of irritation frequently arise. We are provoked sometimes, by the folly and levity of those with whom we are connected—sometimes, by their indifference or neglect—by the incivility of a friend, the haughtiness of a superior, or the insolent behaviour of one in lower station. Hardly a day passes, without somewhat or other occurring, which serves to ruffle the man of impatient spirit. Of course, such a man lives in a continual storm. He knows not what it is to enjoy a train of good humour. Servants, neighbours, friends, spouse, and children, all, through the unrestrained violence of his temper, become sources of disturbance and vexation to him. In vain is affluence, in vain are health and prosperity. The least trifle is sufficient to discompose his mind, and poison his pleasures. His very amusements are mixed with turbulence and passion.

I would beseech this man to consider, of what small moment the provocations which he receives, or at least imagines himself to receive, are really in themselves; but of what great moment he makes them, by suffering them to deprive him of the possession of himself. I would beseech him, to consider, how many hours of happiness he throws away, which a little more patience would allow him to enjoy; and how much he puts it in the power of the most insignificant persons to render him miserable. "But who can expect," we hear him exclaim, "that he is to possess the insensibility of a stone?" "How is it possible for human nature to endure so many repeated provocations? or to bear calmly with such unreasonable behaviour?"—My brother! if you can bear with no instances of unreasonable behaviour, withdraw yourself from the world. You are no longer fit to live in it. Leave the intercourse of men. Retreat to the mountain, and the desert; or shut yourself up in a cell. For here, in the midst of society, *offences must come*. You might as well expect, when you behold a calm atmosphere, and a clear sky, that no clouds were ever to rise, and no winds to blow, as that your life was long to proceed, without receiving provocations from human frailty. The careless and the imprudent, the giddy and the fickle, the ungrateful and the interested, every where meet us. They are the briars and the thorns, with which the paths of human life are beset. He only, who can hold his course among them with patience and equanimity, he, who is prepared to bear what he must expect to happen, is worthy of the name of a man.

Did you only preserve yourself composed for a moment, you would perceive the insignificance of most of those provocations which you magnify so highly. When a few suns more have rolled over your head, the storm will have, of itself, subsided; the cause of your present impatience and disturbance

will be utterly forgotten. Can you not, then, anticipate this hour of calmness to yourself—and begin to enjoy the peace which it will certainly bring? If others have behaved improperly, leave them to their own folly, without becoming the victim of their caprice, and punishing yourself on their account. Patience, in this exercise of it, cannot be too much studied by all who wish their life to flow in a smooth stream. It is the reason of a man, in opposition to the passion of a child. It is the enjoyment of peace, in opposition to uproar and confusion. *He, that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls**.—The next important exercise of patience is,

II. Patience under disappointments. These will often happen to the best and wisest men—sometimes, to the wisest and best concerted plans. They may happen, too, not through any imprudence of those who have devised the plan, not even through the malice or ill design of others; but merely in consequence of some of those cross incidents of life which could not be foreseen. On such occasions, persons of a warm and sanguine temper are presently in a ferment. They had formed their hopes, as they think, upon the justest grounds. They had waited long for success; and borne with many delays. But when their designs are brought to so unexpected an issue—when, without any fault of their own, they find their hopes finally blasted, all patience forsakes them: they no longer possess their souls; the most passionate exclamations break forth. “To whom, except to them, could such a disappointment have happened? Since the creation of the world, was such a combination of disastrous incidents ever beheld? Why are they doomed to be so unfortunate, beyond all others?” Alas! how unskillfully have you calculated the course of human events! How rashly and presumptuously had you trusted to success! To whom was it ever given,

* Prov. xxv. 28.

to guard against all the vicissitudes, which the fluctuating *fashion of the world* is incessantly bringing about? If one friend, to whom you looked up, has died, or another has lost his influence and power—if the opinion of the public is changed, and its favour has been withdrawn—if some mistakes have occurred, to lessen the good-will of a patron on whom you depended—if, through the concurrence of these, or such like circumstances, a more fortunate rival has prevailed against you—what is there in all this, that differs from the ordinary lot of man? Are we not, each in his turn, doomed to experience the uncertainty of worldly pursuits? Why, then, aggravate our misfortunes by the unreasonable violence of an impatient spirit? If our designs have failed, through rashness or misconduct, let us blame ourselves. If they have failed through circumstances which we could not prevent, let us submit to the fate of man; and wait, with patience, till a more favourable opportunity shall occur, of regaining success.

Meanwhile, let us turn to the other side of the prospect; and calmly consider, how dubious it was, whether the success which we longed for, would have proved a blessing. *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* Perhaps, the accomplishment of our designs might have been pregnant with misery. Perhaps from our present disappointment, future prosperity may rise. Of such unlooked for issues, we all know there have been many examples. Who can tell, whether our case may not add one to the number?—At any rate, let us recollect, that there is a Supreme Ruler, who disposes of the affairs of men; under whom, all second causes work only as subordinate agents. Looking up to that irresistible arm, which is stretched over our heads, let us be calm; let us submit and adore. Either to despair or to rage, under disappointments, is sinful. By the former, we injure ourselves. By the latter, we insult Providence, and provoke its displeasure to

continue. *To possess our souls in patience* is, at once, our wisdom as men, and our duty as christians. The benefits of this virtue are so often reaped in this world, that good policy alone would recommend it to every thinking man. Disappointments derange, and overcome, vulgar minds. The patient and the wise, by a proper improvement, frequently make them contribute to their high advantage.—Let me next recommend,

III. Patience under restraints. Numerous are the restraints imposed on us, by the nature of the human condition. To the restraints of authority and law, all must submit. The restraints of education and discipline lie on the young. Considerations of health restrain the indulgence of pleasure. Attention to fortune restrain expence. Regard to friends, whom we are bound to please—respect to established customs, and to the opinions of society—impose restraints on our general behaviour. There is no man, in any rank of life, who is always at liberty to act according as he would incline. In some quarter or other, he is limited by circumstances, that either actually confine, or that ought at least to confine and restrain him.

These restraints, the impatient are apt to scorn. They will needs burst the barriers which reason had erected, or their situation had formed; and without regard to consequences, give free scope to their present wish. Hence, many dangerous excesses flow; much confusion and misery are produced in human life. Had men the patience to submit to their condition, and to wait till it should allow them a freer indulgence of their desires, they might, in a short time, obtain the power of gratifying them with safety. If the young, for instance, would undergo, with patience, the labours of education, they would rise, at a proper period, to honours, riches, or ease. If the infirm would, with patience, bear the regulations which their constitution demands, they might regain the comforts of health. If per-

sons of straitened fortune had patience to conform themselves to their circumstances, and to abridge their pleasures, they might, by degrees, improve and advance their state. Whereas, by eagerness of temper, and precipitancy of indulgence, they forfeit all the advantages which patience would have procured; and incur the opposite evils, to their full extent.

In the present state of human affairs, no lesson is more necessary to be learned by all, to be inculcated on the young, and to be practised by the old, than that of patient submission to necessity. For under the law of necessity, we are all inevitably placed. No man is, or can be, always his own master. We are obliged in a thousand cases, to submit and obey. The discipline of patience preserves our minds easy, by conforming them to our state. By the impetuosity of an impatient and unsubmitting temper, we fight against an unconquerable power; and aggravate the evils we must endure.—Another important exercise of the virtue, concerning which we discourse, is,

IV. Patience under injuries and wrongs. To these, amidst the present confusion of the world, all are exposed. No station is so high, no power so great, no character so unblemished, as to exempt men from being attacked by rashness, malice, or envy. To behave under such attacks with due patience and moderation, is, it must be confessed, one of the most trying exercises of virtue.—But, in order to prevent mistakes on this subject, it is necessary to observe, that a tame submission to wrongs, is not required by religion. We are, by no means, to imagine, that religion tends to extinguish the sense of honour, or to suppress the exertion of a manly spirit. It is under a false apprehension of this kind, that christian patience is sometimes stigmatised in discourse, as no other than a different name for cowardice. On the contrary, every man

of virtue ought to feel what is due to his character, and to support properly his own rights. Resentment of wrong, is an useful principle in human nature; and for the wisest purposes, was implanted in our frame. It is the necessary guard of private rights—and the great restraint on the insolence of the violent, who, if no resistance were made, would trample on the gentle and peaceable.

Resentment, however, if not kept within due bounds, is in hazard of rising into fierce and cruel revenge. It is the office of patience, to temper resentment by reason. In this view it is most properly described in the text, by a man's *possessing his soul*; acting the part which self-defence, which justice or honour, require him to act, without being transported out of himself by the vehemence of anger—or insisting on such degrees of reparation as bear no proportion to the wrong that he has suffered. What proportion, for instance, is there between the life of a man, and an affront received by some rash expression in conversation, which the wise would have slighted; and which, in the course of a few weeks, would have been forgotten by every one? How fantastic, then, how unjustifiable, are those supposed laws of modern honour, which, for such an affront, require no less reparation than the death of a fellow-creature; and which, to obtain this reparation, require a man to endanger his own life? Laws, which, as they have no foundation in reason, never received the least sanction from any of the wise and polished nations of antiquity; but were devised in the darkest ages of the world, and are derived to us from the ferocious barbarity of Gothic manners.

Nothing is so inconsistent with self-possession, as violent anger. It overpowers reason; confounds our ideas; distorts the appearance, and blackens the colour, of every object. By the storm, which it raises within, and by the mischiefs which it occasi-

ons without, it generally brings on the passionate and revengeful man, greater misery than he can bring on his enemy. Patience allays this destructive tempest, by making room for the return of calm and sober thought. It suspends the blow, which sudden resentment was ready to inflict. It disposes us to attend to the alleviating circumstances, which may be discovered in the midst of the wrongs we suppose ourselves to have suffered. Hence, it naturally inclines us to the moderate and gentle side; and, while it allows all proper measures to be taken, both for safety, and for just redress, it makes way for returning peace. Without some degree of patience, exercised under injuries, human life would be rendered a state of perpetual hostility; offences and retaliations would succeed to one another in endless train; and the world would become a field of blood.—It now remains to recommend,

V. Patience under adversity and affliction. This is the most common sense in which this virtue is understood; as it respects disease, poverty, old age, loss of friends, and the other calamities which are incident to human life. *Though a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many**. The various duties, to which patience, under this view, gives rise, afford a larger subject to discourse, than I am at present to pursue. In general, there are two chief exercises of patience under adversity—one respecting God, and another respecting men.

Patience, with respect to God, must in the days of trouble, suppress the risings of a murmuring and rebellious spirit. It must appear in that calm resignation to the will of Heaven, which is expressed in those pious sentiments of ancient good men: *I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it. It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good in his eyes. Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall*

* Eccles. xi. 8.

we not receive evil also? This is loyalty to the great Governor of the universe. This is that reverence, which so well becomes creatures who know they are dependent, and who must confess themselves to be sinful. Such a spirit is fitted to attract the favour of Heaven, and to bring the severe visitation sooner to a close. Whereas the stubborn and impatient, who submit not themselves to the decrees of the Most High, require to be humbled and subdued by a continuance of chastisement.

Patience in adversity, with respect to men, must appear by the composure and tranquillity of our behaviour. The loud complaint, the querulous temper, and fretful spirit disgrace every character. They show a mind that is unmanned by misfortunes. We weaken thereby the sympathy of others, and estrange them from the offices of kindness and comfort. The exertions of pity will be feeble, when it is mingled with contempt. At the same time, by thus weakly yielding to adversity, we allow its weight to bear us down with double pressure. Patience, by preserving composure within, resists the impression which trouble makes from without. By leaving the mind open to every consolation, it naturally tends to alleviate our burden. To maintain a steady and unbroken mind, amidst all the shocks of the world, forms the highest honour of a man. Patience, on such occasions, rises to magnanimity. It shows a great and noble mind, which is able to rest on itself, on God, and a good conscience; which can enjoy itself amidst all evils, and would rather endure the greatest hardships, than submit to what was dishonourable, in order to obtain relief. This gives proof of a strength that is derived from heaven. It is a beam of the immortal light shining on the heart. Such patience is the most complete triumph of religion and virtue; and accordingly it has ever characterised those, whose names have been transmitted

with honour to posterity. It has ennobled the hero, the saint, and the martyr. *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed**.

Thus I have traced patience through several of its most important operations, in different circumstances of life; under provocations; under disappointments; under restraints; under injuries; and under afflictions. We now see, that it is a virtue of universal use. No man, in any condition, can pass his days with tolerable comfort, who has not learned to practise it. His prosperity will be continually disturbed; and his adversity will be clouded with double darkness. He will be uneasy and troublesome to all with whom he is connected; and will be more troublesome to himself than to any other.—Let me particularly advise those, who wish to cultivate so necessary a virtue, to begin their cultivation of it, on occasions when small offences and provocations arise. It is a great, but common, error to imagine, that we are at liberty to give loose reins to temper, among the trivial occurrences of life. No excuse for irritation and impatience can be worse, than what is taken from the person being inconsiderable, or the incident being slight, which threw us off our guard. With inconsiderable persons we are surrounded. Of slight incidents, the bulk of human life is composed. In the midst of these, the ruling temper of the mind is formed. It is only by moderation and self-command then acquired, that we can inure ourselves to patience, when the great conjunctures of life shall put it to a severer trial. If neglected then, we shall afterwards solicit its return in vain. *If thou hast run with footmen, and they have wearied thee, how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan †?*

* 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.

† Jer. xii. 5.

In order to assist us in the acquisition of this grace, let us often contemplate that great model of it, which is displayed in the life of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Whose temper was ever tried by more frequent provocations, more repeated disappointments, more flagrant injuries, or more severe distress? Yet, amidst them all, we behold him patiently enduring *the contradiction of sinners*—to their rudeness, opposing a mild and unruffled, though firm, spirit—and, in the cause of mankind, generously bearing with every indignity. Well might he say, *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart* *. Having such a high example before our eyes, let us be ashamed of those fallies of impatience which we so often suffer to break forth, in the midst of prosperity. By a more manly tranquillity and self-command, let us discover to the world, that, as men, and as christians, we have learned *in patience to possess our souls*.

S E R M O N XLII.

On MODERATION.

PHILIPPIANS, iv. 5.

Let your moderation be known unto all men.

THE present state of man is neither doomed to constant misery, nor designed for complete happiness. It is, in general, a mixed state, of comfort and sorrow, of prosperity and adversity—neither brightened by uninterrupted sunshine, nor overcast with perpetual shade—but subject to alternate successions of the one and the other. While

* Matth. xi. 29.

such a state forbids despair, it also checks presumption. It is equally adverse to despondency of mind, and to high elevation of spirits. The temper, which best suits it, is expressed in the text by *moderation*; which, as the habitual tenor of the soul, the apostle exhorts us to discover in our whole conduct; *let it be known unto all men*. This virtue consists in the equal balance of the soul. It imports such proper government of our passions and pleasures, as shall prevent us from running into extremes of any kind; and shall produce a calm and temperate frame of mind. It chiefly respects our conduct in that state, which comes under the description of ease, or prosperity. Patience, of which I treated in the preceding discourse, directs the proper regulation of the mind, under the disagreeable incidents of life. Moderation determines the bounds within which it should remain, when circumstances are agreeable or promising. What I now purpose is, to point out some of the chief instances, in which moderation ought to take place, and to show the importance of preserving it.

I. Moderation in our wishes. The active mind of man seldom or never rests satisfied with its present condition, how prosperous soever. Originally formed for a wider range of objects, for a higher sphere of enjoyments, it finds itself, in every situation of fortune, straitened and confined. Sensible of deficiency in its state, it is ever sending forth the fond desire, the aspiring wish, after something beyond what is enjoyed at present. Hence, that restlessness which prevails so generally among mankind. Hence, that disgust of pleasures which they have tried—that passion for novelty—that ambition of rising to some degree of eminence or felicity, of which they have formed to themselves an indistinct idea. All which may be considered as indications of a certain native, original greatness in the human soul, swelling beyond the limits of its present con-

dition; and pointing at the higher objects for which it was made. Happy, if these latent remains of our primitive state served to direct our wishes towards their proper destination, and to lead us into the path of true bliss!

But in this dark and bewildered state, the aspiring tendency of our nature unfortunately takes an opposite direction, and feeds a very misplaced ambition. The flattering appearances, which here present themselves to sense—the distinctions, which fortune confers—the advantages and pleasures, which we imagine the world to be capable of bestowing, fill up the ultimate wish of most men. These are the objects which engross their solitary musings, and stimulate their active labours; which warm the breast of the young, animate the industry of the middle aged, and often keep alive the passions of the old, until the very close of life. Assuredly, there is nothing unlawful in our wishing to be freed from whatever is disagreeable, and to obtain a fuller enjoyment of the comforts of life. But when these wishes are not tempered by reason, they are in danger of precipitating us into much extravagance and folly. Desires and wishes are the first springs of action. When they become exorbitant, the whole character is likely to be tainted. If we suffer our fancy to create to itself worlds, of ideal happiness—if we feed our imagination with plans of opulence and splendor far beyond our rank—if we fix to our wishes certain stages of high advancement, or certain degrees of uncommon reputation or distinction, as the sole stations of felicity—the assured consequence will be, that we shall become unhappy in our present state—unfit for acting the part, and discharging the duties that belong to it—we shall discompose the peace and order of our minds, and foment many hurtful passions. Here, then, let moderation begin its reign, by bringing within reason-

ble bounds the wishes that we form. As soon as they become extravagant, let us check them by proper reflexions on the fallacious nature of those objects, which the world hangs out to allure desire.

You have strayed, my friends, from the road which conducts to felicity: you have dishonoured the native dignity of your souls, in allowing your wishes to terminate on nothing higher than worldly ideas of greatness or happiness. Your imagination roves in a land of shadows. Unreal forms deceive you. It is no more than a phantom, an illusion of happiness, which attracts your fond admiration; nay, an illusion of happiness which often conceals much real misery. Do you imagine, that all are happy, who have attained to those summits of distinction, towards which your wishes aspire? Alas! how frequently has experience showed, that where roses were supposed to bloom, nothing but briars and thorns grew? Reputation, beauty, riches, grandeur, nay, royalty itself, would, many a time, have been gladly exchanged by the possessors, for that more quiet and humble station, with which you are now dissatisfied. With all that is splendid and shining in the world, it is decreed, that there should mix many deep shades of woe. On the elevated situations of fortune, the great calamities of life chiefly fall. There the storm spends its violence, and there the thunder breaks—while, safe and unhurt, the inhabitant of the vale remains below. Retreat, then, from those vain and pernicious excursions of extravagant desire. Satisfy yourselves with what is rational and attainable. Train your minds to moderate views of human life, and human happiness. Remember, and admire, the wisdom of Agur's wish. *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and*

take the name of my God in vain*. Let me recommend,

II. Moderation in our pursuits. Wishes and desires rest within. If immoderate and improper, though they taint the heart, yet society may not be affected by them. The obscure and harmless individual may indulge his dreams, without disturbing the public peace. But when the active pursuits in which we engage, rise beyond moderation, they fill the world with great disorders—often with flagrant crimes. This admonition chiefly respects the ambitious men of the world. I say not, that all ambition is to be condemned; or that high pursuits ought, on every occasion, to be checked. Some men are formed by nature, for rising into conspicuous stations of life. In following the impulse of their minds, and properly exerting the talents with which God has blessed them, there is room for ambition to act in a laudable sphere, and to become the instrument of much public good. But this may safely be pronounced, that the bulk of men are ready to over-rate their own abilities, and to imagine themselves equal to higher things than they were ever designed for by nature. Be sober, therefore, in fixing your aims, and planning your destined pursuits. Beware of being led aside from the plain path of sound and moderate conduct, by those false lights which self-flattery is always ready to hang out. By aiming at a mark too high, you may fall short of what it was within your power to have reached. Instead of attaining to eminence, you may expose yourselves to derision; nay, may bring upon your heads manifold disasters. *I say to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly †.*

Whatever your aims be, there is one exercise of moderation which must be enjoined to those of the greatest abilities as well as to others; that is, never

* Prov. xxx. 8. 9.

† Rom. xii. 3.

to transgress the bounds of moral duty. Amidst the warmth of pursuit, accustom yourselves to submit to the restraints, which religion and virtue, which propriety and decency, which regard to reputation and character, impose. Think not, that there are no barriers which ought to stop your progress. It is from a violent and impetuous spirit that all the evils spring, which are so often found to accompany ambition. Hence, in private life, the laws of truth and honour are violated. Hence, in public contests, the peace and welfare of nations have been so often sacrificed to the ambitious projects of the great. The man of moderation, as he is temperate in his wishes, so in his pursuits he is regulated by virtue. A good conscience is to him more valuable than any success. He is not so much bent on the accomplishment of any design, as to take a dishonourable step, in order to compass it. He can have patience. He can brook disappointments. He can yield to unfurmountable obstacles; and, by gentle and gradual progress, is more likely to succeed in the end, than others are, by violence and impetuosity. In his highest enterprise, he wishes not to have the appearance of a meteor, which fires the atmosphere—or of a comet, which astonishes the public, by its blazing, eccentric course—but rather to resemble those steady luminaries of heaven, which advance in their orbits, with a silent and regular motion. He approves himself thereby to the virtuous, the wise, and discerning; and, by a temperate and unexceptionable conduct, escapes those dangers which persons of an opposite description are perpetually ready to incur.

III. Be moderate in your expectations. When your state is flourishing, and the course of events proceeds according to your wish, suffer not your minds to be vainly lifted up. Flatter not yourselves with high prospects of the increasing favours of the world, and the continuing applause of men. Say not within your hearts: *My mountain stands strong,*

and shall never be moved. I shall never see adversity. To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly.— You are betraying yourselves—you are laying a sure foundation of disappointment and misery, when you allow your fancy to soar to such lofty pinnacles of confident hope. By building your house in this airy region, you are preparing for yourselves a great and cruel fall. *Your trust is the spider's web. You may lean on your house; but it shall not stand. You may hold it fast; but it shall not endure.* For, to man on earth it was never granted, to gratify all his hopes, or to persevere in one tract of uninterrupted prosperity. Unpleasing vicissitudes never fail to succeed those that were grateful. *The fashion of the world, how gay or smiling soever, passeth, and often passeth suddenly, away.*

By want of moderation in our hopes, we not only increase dejection when disappointment comes, but we accelerate disappointment; we bring forward, with greater speed, disagreeable changes in our state. For the natural consequence of presumptuous expectation, is rashness in conduct. He, who indulges confident security, of course neglects due precautions against the dangers that threaten him; and his fall will be foreseen, and predicted. He not only exposes himself, unguarded, to dangers, but he multiplies them against himself. By presumption and vanity, he either provokes enmity, or incurs contempt.

The arrogant mind, and the proud hope, are equally contrary to religion, and to prudence. The world cannot bear such a spirit; and Providence seldom fails to check it. The Almighty beholds with displeasure those who, intoxicated with prosperity, forget their dependence on that Supreme Power which raised them up. His awful government of the world, has been in nothing more conspicuous than in *bringing low the lofty looks of man, and scattering the proud in the imagination of their minds.*

Is not this the great Babylon, which I have built by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? Thus exclaimed the presumptuous monarch, in the pride of his heart. But, lo! when the word was yet in his mouth, the visitation from heaven came, and the voice was heard; O, *Nebuchadnezzar!* *thee it is spoken; thy kingdom is departed from thee.— He that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted* †. A temperate spirit and moderate expectations, are the best safeguard of the mind, in this uncertain and changing state. They enable us to pass through life with most comfort. When we rise in the world, they contribute to our elevation: and if we must fall, they render our fall the lighter.

IV. Moderation in our pleasures is an important exercise of the virtue which we are now considering. It is an invariable law of our present condition that every pleasure, which is pursued to excess, converts itself into poison. What was intended for the cordial and refreshment of human life, through want of moderation, we turn to its bane. In all the pleasures of sense, it is apparent, that, only when indulged within certain limits, they confer satisfaction. No sooner do we pass the line which temperance has drawn, than pernicious effects come forward, and show themselves. Could I lay open to your view the monuments of death, they would read a lecture in favour of moderation, much more powerful than any that the most eloquent preachers can give. You would behold the graves people with the victims of intemperance. You would behold those chambers of darkness hung round, on every side, with the trophies of luxury, drunkenness, and sensuality. So numerous would you find those martyrs of iniquity, that it may safely be asserted, where war or pestilence have slain their thou-

* Daniel, iv. 30, 31.

† Luke, xiv. 11.

fands, intemperate pleasure has slain its ten thousands.

While the want of moderation in pleasure brings men to an untimely grave—at the same time, until they arrive there, it pursues and afflicts them with evils innumerable. To what cause, so much as to this, are owing, faded youth and premature old age—an enervated body and an enfeebled mind—together with all that long train of diseases, which the indulgence of appetite and sense have introduced into the world? Health, cheerfulness and vigour, are known to be the offspring of temperance. The man of moderation brings to all the natural and innocent pleasures of life, that sound uncorrupted relish, which gives him a much fuller enjoyment of them, than the palled and vitiated appetite of the voluptuary allows him to know. He culls the flower of every allowable gratification, without dwelling upon it until the flavour be lost. He tastes the sweet of every pleasure, without pursuing it till the bitter dregs rise. Whereas the man of opposite character dips so deep, that he never fails to stir an impure and noxious sediment, which lies at the bottom of the cup. In the pleasures, besides, which are regulated by moderation, there is always that dignity, which goes along with innocence. No man needs to be ashamed of them. They are consistent with honour—with the favour of God and of man. But the sensualist, who disdains all restraint in his pleasures, is odious in the public eye. His vices become gross—his character, contemptible; and he ends in being a burden both to himself and to society. Let me exhort you, once more,

V. To moderation in all your passions. This exercise of the virtue is the more requisite, because there is no passion in human nature but what has, of itself, a tendency to run into excess. For all passion implies a violent emotion of mind. Of

course, it is apt to derange the regular course of our ideas, and to produce confusion within. Nothing at the same time, is more seducing than passion. During the time when it grows and swells, it constantly justifies, to our apprehension, the tumult which it creates, by means of a thousand false arguments which it forms, and brings to its aid.—Of some passions, such as anger and resentment, the excess is so obviously dangerous, as loudly to call for moderation. He, who gives himself up to the impetuosity of such passions, without restraint, is universally condemned by the world, and hardly accounted a man of sound mind. But what is less apt to be attended to, some, even of those passions which are reckoned innocent, or whose tendency to disorder and evil is not apparent, stand, nevertheless, in need of moderation and restraint, as well as others. For, such is the feebleness of our nature, that every passion, which has for its object any worldly good, is in hazard of attaching us too strongly, and of transporting us beyond the bounds of reason. If allowed to acquire the full and unrestrained dominion of the heart, it is sufficient, in various situations, to render us miserable; and, almost in every situation, by its engrossing power, to render us negligent of duties, which, as men or christians, we are bound to perform.

Of the insidious growth of passion, therefore, we have great reason to beware. We ought always to have at hand considerations, which may assist us in tempering its warmth, and in regaining possession of our souls. Let us be persuaded, that moments of passion are always moments of delusion; that nothing truly is, what it then seems to be; that all the opinions which we then form, are erroneous—and all the judgments, which we pass, are extravagant. Let moderation accustom us to wait until the fumes of passion be spent; until the mist which it has raised begin to be dissipated. We

shall then be able to see where truth and right lie; and reason shall, by degrees, resume the ascendant. On no occasion, let us imagine, that strength of mind is shown by violence of passion. This is not the strength of men, but the impetuosity of children. It is the strength of one, who is in the delirium of a fever, or under the disease of madness. The strength of such a person is indeed increased. But it is an unnatural strength, which, being under no proper guidance, is directed towards objects that occasion his destruction. True strength of mind is shown in governing and resisting passion, not in giving it scope—in restraining the wild beast within—and acting on the most trying occasions, according to the dictates of conscience, and temperate reason.

Thus I have pointed out, in several instances, how moderation ought to be displayed: moderation in our wishes; moderation in our pursuits; moderation in our hopes; moderation in our pleasures; moderation in our passions. It is a principle which should habitually influence our conduct, and form the reigning temperature of the soul.

The great motive to this virtue is suggested by the words immediately following the text; *the Lord is at hand*. The Judge is coming, who is to close this temporary scene of things, and to introduce a higher state of existence. The day is at hand, which will place the great concerns of men in a point of view very different from that in which they are at present beheld; will strip the world of its false glory; will detect the vanity of earthly pursuits, and disclose objects which have the proper title to interest a rational mind. Objects acquire power to engage our passions, only in proportion as they are conceived to be great. But great, or little, are no more than terms of comparison. Those things, which appear great to one who knows nothing greater, will sink into a diminutive size, when he becomes acquaint-

ed with objects of a higher nature. Were it oftener in our thoughts, that *the Lord is at hand*, none of those things, which now discompose and agitate worldly men, would appear of sufficient magnitude to raise commotion in our breasts. Enlarged views of the future destination of man, and of the place which he may hope to possess in an eternal world, naturally give birth to moderation of mind. They tend to cool all misplaced ardour about the advantages of this state; and to produce that calm and temperate frame of spirit, which becomes men and christians. They give no ground for entire disregard of earthly concerns. While we are men, we must feel and act as such. But they afford a good reason, why they who believe *the Lord to be at hand*, should let their *moderation* appear, and *be known unto all men*.

S E R M O N XLIII.

On the JOY, and the BITTERNESS of the HEART.

PROVERBS, xiv. 10.

The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.

IT is well known, that men have always been much inclined to place their happiness in the advantages of fortune, and the distinctions of rank. Hence these have been pursued by the multitude with such avidity, that every principle of honour, probity, and virtue, have been sacrificed to the attainment of them. At the same time, many circumstances might have convinced men, that suppos-

ing them to be successful in the pursuit, it by no means followed, that happiness was to be the reward. For if happiness be, in truth, essentially connected with splendid fortune, or exalted rank, how comes it to pass, that many, in the inferior stations of life, visibly spend their days with more comfort, than they who occupy the higher departments of the world? Why does the beggar sing, while the king is sad? A small measure of reflexion on our nature might satisfy us, that there are other principles of happiness or misery, too often overlooked by the world, which immediately affect the heart, and operate there with greater force and power, than any circumstances of rank or fortune. This is the observation of the wise man in the text, and what I now purpose to illustrate. I shall take a view of the chief sources of that *bitterness which the heart knoweth*, and of that *joy with which a stranger doth not intermeddle*; and then shall point out the proper improvements to be made of the subject.

If we enquire carefully into the sources of the joy or bitterness of the heart, we shall find, that they ~~are~~ are chiefly two; that they arise either from a man's own mind and temper; or, from the connexion in which he stands with some of his fellow-creatures. In other words, the circumstances, which most essentially affect every man's happiness, are, his personal character, and his social feelings.

I. Every man's own mind and temper is, necessarily, to himself a source of much inward joy or bitterness. For every man, if we may be allowed the expression, is more connected with himself, than with any external object. He is constantly a companion to himself in his own thoughts; and what he meets with there, must, of all things, contribute most to his happiness or his disquiet. Whatever his condition in the world be, whether high or low, if he find no cause to upbraid himself for

his behaviour—if he be satisfied that his conduct proceeds upon a rational plan—if, amidst the failings incident to humanity, his conscience be, in the main, free from reproach, and his mind undisturbed by any dismal presages of futurity—the foundation is laid for a placid and agreeable tenor of life. If to this you add a calm and cheerful temper, not easily fretted or disturbed, not subject to envy, nor prone to violent passion, much of that joy will be produced, which it is said in the text, *a stranger intermeddleth not with*. For this is an intrinsic joy, independent of all foreign causes. *The upright man, as it is written, is satisfied from himself*. Undisturbed by the vexations of folly, or the remorse of guilt, his nights will be peaceful, and his days serene. His mind is a kingdom to itself. A good conscience and good temper prepare, even in the midst of poverty, *a continual feast*.

But how sadly will the scene be reversed, if the first thoughts which occur to a man concerning himself, shall be of a gloomy and threatening kind—if his temper, instead of calmness and self-enjoyment, shall yield him nothing but disquiet and painful agitation? In any situation of fortune, is it possible for him to be happy, whose mind is in this troubled state? *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit, who can bear?* Vigour of mind may enable a man to sustain many shocks of adversity. In his spirit, as long as it is sound, he can find a resource, when other auxiliaries fail. But if that, which should sustain him, be enfeebled and broken—if that, to which he has recourse for the cure of other sorrows, become itself the wounded part—to what quarter can he turn for relief?

The wounds, which the spirit suffers, are owing chiefly to three causes—to folly, to passion, or to guilt. They frequently originate from folly; that is, from vain and improper pursuits, which, though not directly criminal, are unsuitable to a man's age,

character, or condition, in the world. In consequence of these, he beholds himself degraded and exposed; and suffers the pain of many a mortifying reflexion, and many an humbling comparison of himself with others. The distress, occasioned by a sense of folly, is aggravated by any violent passion being allowed to take possession of the heart. Even though it be of the class of those which are reckoned innocent, yet, if it have entirely seized and overpowered a man, it destroys his tranquillity, and brings his mind into a perturbed state. But if it be a passion of the black and vicious kind, it is sufficient to blast the most flourishing condition, and to poison all his joys: If to those wounds inflicted by folly, or by passion, you add the wound of guilt, the remorse and fear produced by criminal deeds, you fill up the measure of pain and bitterness of heart. Often have the terrors of conscience occasioned inward paroxysms, or violent agitations of mind. A dark and threatening cloud seems, to the conscious sinner, to be hanging over his head. He, who believes himself despised or hated by men, and who dreads, at the same time, an avenging God, can derive little pleasure from the external comforts of life. The bitterness of his heart infuses itself into every draught which pleasure offers to his lips.

The external misfortunes of life, disappointments, poverty, and sickness, are nothing in comparison of those inward distresses of mind, occasioned by folly, by passion, and by guilt. They may, indeed, prevail in different degrees, according as one or other of those principles of bitterness is predominant. But they are seldom parted far asunder from one another: and when, as it too often happens, all the three are complicated, they complete the misery of man. The disorders of the mind, having then arisen to their height, become of all things the most dreadful. The shame of folly, the violence of passion, and the remorse of guilt, acting in con-

junction, have too frequently driven men to the last and abhorred refuge, of seeking relief in death, from a life too embittered to be any longer endured. I proceed to consider,

II. Other troubles, and other joys of the heart, arising from sources different from those that I have now described—founded in the relations or connexions which we have with others, and springing from the feelings which these occasion. Such causes of sorrow or joy are of an external nature. Religion does not teach, that all the sources of inward pleasure or pain are derived from our temper and moral behaviour. These are indeed the principal springs of bitterness or joy. In one way or other, they affect all the pleasures and pains of life; but they include not, within themselves, the whole of them. Our Creator did not intend, that the happiness of each individual should have no dependence on those who are around him. Having connected us in society by many ties, it is his decree, that these ties should prove, both during their subsistence, and in their dissolution, causes of pleasure or pain, immediately, and often deeply, affecting the human heart. My doctrine, therefore, is not, that *the bitterness, which the heart knoweth as its own, and the joy with which a stranger intermeddeth not*, is independent of every thing external. What I assert is, that this *bitterness*, and this *joy*, depend much more on other causes, than on riches or poverty, on high or low stations in the world; that, equally in the conditions of elevated fortune, and of private life, the most material circumstances of trouble or felicity, next to the state of our own mind and temper, are the sensations and affections which arise from the connexions we have with others.

In order to make this appear, let us suppose a man, in any rank or condition of life, happy in his family and his friends—soothed by the cordial intercourse of kind affections, which he partakes with

them—enjoying the comfort of doing them good offices, and receiving in return their sincerest gratitude—experiencing no jealousy nor envy, no inquiet or alienation of affection, among those with whom he is connected; how many and how copious sources of inward joy open to such a man! how smooth is the tenor of a life that proceeds in such a course! What a smiling aspect does the love of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, of friends and relations, give to every surrounding object, and every returning day! With what lustre does it gild even the small habitation where such placid intercourse dwells—where such scenes of heartfelt satisfaction succeed uninterruptedly to one another!

But let us suppose this joyful intercourse to be broken off, in an untimely hour, by the cruel hand of the last foe; let us imagine the family, once so happy among themselves, to behold the parent, the child, or the spouse, to whom their hearts were attached by the tenderest ties, stretched on the cold bed of death; then, what bitterness does the heart know! This, in the strictest sense, is its *own bitterness*; from which it is not in the power of any external circumstance whatever to afford it relief. Amidst those piercing griefs of the heart, all ranks of life are levelled; all distinctions of fortune are forgotten. Unavailing are the trophies of splendid woe, with which riches deck the fatal couch, to give the least comfort to the mourner. The prince, and the peasant, then equally feel their *own bitterness*. Dwelling on the melancholy remembrance of joys that are past and gone, the one forgets his poverty; the other despises the gilded trappings of his state. Both, in that sad hour, are fully sensible, that on the favours of fortune it depends not to make man happy in this world.

But it is not only the death of friends, which, in the midst of a seemingly prosperous state, is able to bring distress home to the heart. From various failures in their conduct when living, arises much

of the inward uneasiness we suffer. It will, in general, be found, that the behaviour of those among whom we live in near connexion, is, next to personal character and temper, the chief source, either of the pleasures, or of the disquietudes, of every man's life. As, when their behaviour is cordial and satisfactory, it is, of all external things, the most soothing to the mind; so, on the other hand, their levity, their inattention, or occasional harshness, even though it proceed to no decided breach of friendship, yet ruffles and frets the temper. Social life, harrassed with those petty vexations, resembles a road which a man is doomed daily to travel; but finds it rugged, and stony, and painful to be trod.

The case becomes much worse, if the base and criminal conduct of persons whom we have once loved, dissolve all the bonds of amity, and show that our confidence has been abused. Then are opened some of the deepest springs of bitterness in the human heart. Behold the heart of the parent, torn by the unworthy behaviour, and cruel ingratitude of the child, whom he had trained up with the fondest hopes—on whom he had lavished his whole affection—and for whose sake he had laboured and toiled, through the course of a long life. Behold the endearments of the conjugal state, changed into black suspicion and mistrust—the affectionate spouse, or the virtuous husband, left to mourn, with a broken heart, the infidelity of the once-beloved partner of their life. Behold the unsuspecting friend betrayed, in the hour of danger, by the friend in whom he trusted; or, in the midst of severe misfortune, meeting nothing but cold indifference, perhaps scorn and contempt, where he had expected to find the kindest sympathy. Are these, let me ask, uncommon scenes in the world? Are such distresses peculiar to any rank or station? Do they chiefly befall persons in humble life, and have the great any prerogative which affords

them exemption? When the heart is sorely wounded by the ingratitude or faithlessness of those, on whom it had leaned with the whole weight of affection, where shall it turn for relief? Will it find comfort in the recollection of honours and titles, or in the contemplation of surrounding treasures? Talk not of the honours of a court. Talk not of the wealth of the east. These, in the hours of heart-bitterness, are spurned, as contemptible and vile—perhaps cursed, as indirect causes of the present distress. The dart has made its way to the heart. There, there, it is fixed. The very seat of feeling is assailed; and in proportion to the sensibility of the sufferer's heart, and the tenderness of his affections, such, unfortunately, will be his degree of anguish. A good conscience, and hope in God, may indeed bring him consolation. But under such distresses of the heart, as I have described, fortune, be it as flourishing as you will, is no more than an empty pageant. It is a feeble reed, which affords no support. It is a house of straw, which is scattered before the wind.

Thus you see this doctrine meeting us from many quarters, that the heart knows a bitterness and a joy of its own, altogether distinct from the uneasiness or the pleasure that is produced by the circumstances of external fortune; arising either from personal character, and the state of a man's own mind—or from the affections excited by the relations in which he stands to others. This joy, and this bitterness, are, each of them, of so much greater consequence than any distinctions of fortune, that, blessed with the former, one may be happy, as far as human happiness goes, in a cottage; and, afflicted with the latter, he must be miserable in a palace. Let us now proceed to an important part of the subject, the practical improvement to which this doctrine leads.

First, Let it serve to moderate our passions for

riches, and high situations in the world. It is well known, that the eager pursuit of these is the chief incentive to the crimes that fill the world. Hence among the middle and lower ranks of men, all the fraud, falsehood, and treachery, with which the competition for gain infests society. Hence, in the higher stations of the world, all the atrocious crimes flowing from ambition, and the love of power, by which the peace of mankind has so often been broken, and the earth stained with blood. Had these coveted advantages the power, when obtained, of insuring joy to the heart, and rendering it a stranger to bitterness, some apology might be offered for the violence to which they have given occasion. The prize might be supposed worthy of being acquired at a high expense, when so much depended on the attainment. But I have shown, I hope with satisfactory evidence, that the contrary is the truth. I say not, that the advantages of fortune deserve no regard from a wise or a good man. Poverty is always distressing. Opulence and rank are both attended with many comforts, and may be rendered subservient to the most valuable purposes. But what I say is, that it is a great error to rate them beyond their just value. Secondary advantages, inferior assistances to felicity, they are—and no more. They rank below every thing that immediately affects the heart, and that is a native source of joy or bitterness there. If a man be either unhappy in his dispositions, or unhappy in all his connexions, you heap upon him in vain, all the treasures, and all the honours, which kings can bestow. Divest these things, then, of that false glare which the opinions of the multitude throw around them. Contemplate them with a more impartial eye. Pursue them with less eagerness. Above all, never sacrifice to the pursuit any degree of probity or moral worth, of candour or good affection; if you would not lay a foundation

for that bitterness of heart, which none of the goods of fortune can either compensate or cure.

Secondly, let the observations which have been made, correct our mistakes, and check our complaints, concerning a supposed promiscuous distribution of happiness in this world. The charge of injustice, which so often, on this account, hath been brought against Providence, rests entirely on this ground, that the happiness and misery of men may be estimated by the degree of their external prosperity. This is the delusion under which the multitude have always laboured; but which a just consideration of the invisible springs of happiness that affect the heart, is sufficient to correct. If you would judge whether a man be really happy, it is not solely to his houses and his lands, to his equipage and his retinue, you are to look. Unless you could see farther, and discern what joy, or what bitterness, his heart feels, you can pronounce nothing concerning him. That proud and wicked man, whom you behold surrounded with state and splendour, and upon whom you think the favours of heaven so improperly lavished, may be a wretch, pining away in secret, with a thousand griefs unknown to the world. That poor man, who appears neglected and overlooked, may, in his humble station, be partaking of all the moral, and all the social joys, that exhilarate the heart; may be living cheerful, contented, and happy. Cease, then, to murmur against dispensations of Providence, which are, to us, so imperfectly known. Envy not the prosperity of sinners. Judge not of the real condition of men, from what floats merely on the surface of their state. Let us rather,

Thirdly, Turn our attention to those internal sources of happiness or misery, on which it hath been shown that so much depends. As far as the bitterness or joy of the heart arises from the first of those great springs which I assigned to it—our own

conduct and temper—so far our happiness is placed, in some measure, in our own hands. What is amiss or disordered within, in consequence of folly, of passion, or guilt, may be rectified by due care, under the assistance of divine grace. He, who thereby attains to a tranquil and composed state of heart, free from ill-humour and disgust, from violent passions, and from vexing remorse, is laying a foundation for enjoyment of himself, much surer and broader, than if he were amassing thousands to increase his estate.

With regard to the other spring of joy or bitterness of heart, arising from our connexions with others, here, indeed, we are more dependent on things not within our power. These connexions are not always of our own forming; and even when they have been formed by choice, the wisest are liable to be disappointed in their expectations. Yet here, too, it will be found, that the proper regulation of the heart is of the utmost importance, both for improving the joys which our situation affords, and for mitigating the griefs which our connexions may render unavoidable. As far as the choice of friends or relatives depends on ourselves, let their virtue and worth ever direct that choice, if we look for any lasting felicity from it. In all the habits and attachments of social life, after they are formed, let it be our study, to fulfil properly our own part. Let nothing be wanting on our side, to nourish that mutual harmony and affectionate friendship, which, in every situation of life, as has been shown, is of so great consequence to our peace and satisfaction. It is not, indeed, in our power to preserve always alive those friends, in whom our hearts delight. It is often not in our power to prevent the ingratitude and unworthy behaviour of other friends, from whom we once expected comfort. But under those afflicting incidents of life, much may be done by proper employ-

ment of the thoughts, and direction of the affections, for obtaining relief. To a purified and well regulated heart, reason and religion can bring many aids for healing its wounds, and restoring its peace—aids which, to the negligent and vicious, are wholly unknown. The greater experience we have of the vicissitudes of human life, with more weight will that precept of the wise man always come home to our remembrance; *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life* *.—Hence arises,

In the fourth and last place, another instruction, that it is of the utmost importance to us all;—frequently to look up to him who made the human heart; and to implore his assistance in the regulation and government of it. Known to him, are all the sources of bitterness and joy by which it is affected. On him it depends, to let them forth, or to shut them up—to increase, or to diminish them, at his pleasure. In a study so infinitely important to happiness, as that of the preservation of inward peace, we cannot be too earnest in beseeching aid from the great Father of spirits, to enable us to keep our hearts free from distress and trouble.—Besides the assistance which we may hope to derive from divine grace, the employments of devotion themselves, form one of the most powerful means of composing and tranquillising the heart. On various occasions, when the sources of heart-bitterness have been most overflowing, devotion has been found the only refuge of the sufferer. Devotion opens a sanctuary, to which they, whose hearts have been most deeply wounded, can always fly. Within that quiet and sacred retreat, they have often found a healing balsam prepared. When grieved by men, they have derived, from the ascent of the mind towards God and celestial objects, much to sooth them at present, and much to hope for in

* Prov. iv. 23.

future. Let us, therefore, neglect no mean with which religion can furnish us, for promoting the joys, and assuaging the bitterness of the heart. Amidst the frailties of our nature, the inconstancy of men, and the frequent changes of human life, we shall find every assistance that can be procured, little enough, for enabling us to pass our few days with tolerable comfort and peace.

S E R M O N XLIV.

On CHARACTERS of IMPERFECT GOODNESS.

MARK, X. 21.

Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him.

THE characters of men, which the world presents to us, are infinitely diversified. In some, either the good or the bad qualities are so predominant, as strongly to mark the character, to discriminate one person as a virtuous, another as a vicious man. In others, these qualities are so mixed together, as to leave the character doubtful. The light and the shade are so much blended, the colours of virtue and vice run in such a manner into one another, that we can hardly distinguish where the one ends, and the other begins; and we remain in suspense, whether to blame or to praise. While we admire those who are thoroughly good, and detest the grossly wicked, it is proper also to bestow attention on those imperfect characters, where there may be much to praise, and somewhat to blame; and where regard to the commendable part, shall not hinder us from remarking what is defective or

faulty. Such attentions will be found the more useful, as characters of this mixed sort are, more frequently than any other, exhibited to us in the commerce of society.

It was one of this sort, which gave occasion to the incident recorded in the text. The incident seems to have been considered as remarkable, since it is recounted by three of the evangelical writers; and by them all, with nearly the same circumstances. The person, to whom the history relates, was *a ruler*—one of higher rank and station than those who usually resorted to Jesus. He was *a rich man*: He was *a young man*. His whole behaviour was prepossessing and engaging. He appears to have conceived a high opinion of our Lord. He addressed him with the utmost respect; and the question which he put to him was proper and important. *He kneeled to him; and said, Good Master, What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* His conduct in the world had been regular and decent. He could protest, that he had hitherto kept himself free from any gross vice; and, and in his dealings with others, had observed the precepts of God. Our Lord, *beholding him*, is said to have *loved him*; whence we have reason to conclude, that he was not hypocritical in his professions; and that his countenance carried the expression of good dispositions, as his speech, and his manners, were altogether complacent and gentle. Yet this person, amiable as he was, when his virtue was put to the test, disappointed the hopes which he had given reason to form. Attached in all probability, to the indulgence of ease and pleasure, he wanted fortitude of mind, to part with the advantages of the world, for the sake of religion. When our Lord required him to fulfil his good intentions, by relinquishing his fortune, becoming one of his followers, and preparing himself to encounter sufferings, the sacrifice appeared to him too great. Impressions of virtue, however, still remain-

ed on his mind. He was sensible of what he ought to have done; and regretted his want of courage to do it. *He was sorrowful: he was grieved: yet he went away.*

Persons of a character somewhat resembling this, all of us may have met with—especially, among the young—among those who have been liberally educated, and polished by good society. They abhor open vice, and crimes that disturb the world. They have a respect for religion. They are willing to receive instruction for their conduct. They are modest and unassuming—respectful to their superiors in age or station—gentle in their address—inoffensive and courteous in their whole behaviour. They are fond of obliging every one—unwilling to hurt or displease any. Such persons we cannot but love. We gladly promise well of them; and are disposed to forward and assist them. Yet such is the weakness of our nature, that at the bottom of this character there may lie, as we see exemplified in the instance before us, some secret and material defects. That vigour of mind, that firmness of principle, may be wanting, which is requisite for enabling them to act with propriety, when their virtue is put to a decisive trial. The softness of their nature is unfavourable to a steady perseverance in the course of integrity. They possess the amiable qualities: but there is ground to suspect, that in the estimable ones they are deficient. While, therefore, we by no means class them among the bad, we dare not give them the full praise of virtue. When they set out in the world, we cannot pronounce with confidence, what confirmed features their character will assume—nor how far they can be depended upon, in future life. Allow me now to point out the dangers, which such persons are most likely to incur; and to show what is requisite for them farther to study, in order to their fulfilling the part of good men and true christians.

I. Persons of this description are not qualified for discharging aright many duties, to which their situation in life may call them. In certain circumstances, they behave with abundance of propriety. When all is calm and smooth around them—when nothing occurs, to agitate the mind, or to disturb the tenor of placid life, none of their defects come forward. They are beloved; and they are useful. They promote the comfort of human society; and, by gentleness and courtesy of manners, serve to cement men together in agreeable union. But to sail on the tranquil surface of an unruffled lake, and to steer a safe course through a troubled and stormy ocean, require different talents: and alas! human life oftener resembles the stormy ocean, than the unruffled lake. We shall not have been long embarked, without finding the resemblance to hold too closely.

Amidst the bustle of the world, amidst the open contentions and secret enmities, which prevail in every society, mildness and gentleness alone are not sufficient to carry us, with honour, through the duties of our different stations—as heads of families, citizens, subjects, magistrates, or as engaged in the pursuits of our several callings. Disturbances and trials arise, which demand vigorous exertions of all the moral powers—of patience, vigilance, and self-denial—of constancy and fortitude, to support us under danger and reproach—of temperance, to restrain us from being carried away by pleasure—of firm and determined principle, to make us despise the bribes of sin. These manly dispositions of mind are indispensably necessary to prepare one, for surmounting the discouragements of virtue—and for struggling honourably through the hardships of life. Unless he be thus armed and fortified, whatever good intentions have been in his heart, they are likely to be frustrated in action. Nothing that is great, can be undertaken. Nothing that is difficult or hazardous, can be accomplished. Nor are we to ima-

gine, that it is only in times of persecution, or war, or civil commotions, that there is occasion for those stronger efforts, those masculine virtues of the soul, to be displayed. The private and seemingly quiet stations of life, often call men forth, in the days of peace, to severe trials of firmness and constancy. The life of very few proceeds in so uniform a train, as not to oblige them to discover, in some situation or other, what portion they possess, of the estimable qualities of man. Hence it sometimes happens, that persons whose manners were much less promising and engaging than those of others, have nevertheless, when brought to act a part in critical circumstances, performed that part with more unsullied honour, and firmer integrity, than they.

II. Persons of the character I have described are ill fitted, not only for discharging the higher duties of life, but also for resisting the common temptations to vice. With good dispositions in their mind, with a desire, like the young ruler in the text, to know what they shall do in order to *inherit eternal life*; yet, when the terms required of them interfere with any favourite enjoyment, like him they are *sorrowful; and go away*. The particular trial, to which he was put, may appear to be a hard one, and to exceed the ordinary rate of virtue. Our Lord, who discerned his heart, saw it to be necessary, in his case, for bringing his character to the test. But in cases, where trials of much less difficulty present themselves, they, who partake of a character similar to his, are often found to give way. The good qualities which they possess, border on certain weaknesses of the mind; and these weaknesses are apt to betray them insensibly into vices, with which they are connected.

Good-nature, for instance, is in danger of running into that unlimited complaisance, which assimilates men to the loose manners of those whom they find around them. Pliant, and yielding in their temper,

they have not force to stand by the decisions of their own minds, with regard to right and wrong. Like the animal, which is said to assume the colour of every object to which it is applied, they lose all proper character of their own; and are formed by the characters of those with whom they chance to associate.—The mild are apt to sink into habits of indolence and sloth. The cheerful and gay, when warmed by pleasure and mirth, lose that sobriety and self-denial, which is essential to the support of virtue.—Even modesty and submission, qualities so valuable in themselves, and so highly ornamental to youth, sometimes degenerate into a vicious timidity; a timidity which restrains men from doing their duty with firmness—which cannot stand the frown of the great, the reproach of the multitude, or even the ridicule and sneer of the scorner.

Nothing can be more amiable than a constant desire to please, and an unwillingness to offend or hurt. Yet in characters where this is a predominant feature, defects are often found. Fond always to oblige, and afraid to utter any disagreeable truth, such persons are sometimes led to dissemble. Their love of truth is sacrificed to their love of pleasing. Their speech, and their manners, assume a studied courtesy. You cannot always depend on their smile; nor, when they promise, be sure of the performance. They mean and intend well. But the good intention is temporary. Like wax, they yield easily to every impression: and the transient friendship, contracted with one person, is effaced by the next. Undistinguished desire to oblige, often proves, in the present state of human things, a dangerous habit. They who cannot, on many occasions, give a firm and steady denial, or who cannot break off a connexion, which has been hastily and improperly formed, stand on the brink of many mischiefs. They will be seduced by the corrupting, ensnared by the artful, betrayed by those in whom

they had placed their trust. Unsuspecting themselves, they were flattered with the belief of having many friends around them. Elated with sanguine hopes, and cheerful spirits, they reckoned, that *to-morrow would be as this day, and more abundant.* Injudicious liberality, and thoughtless profusion, are the consequence, until, in the end, the straits to which they are reduced, bring them into mean or dishonourable courses. Through innocent but unguarded weakness, and from want of the severer virtues, they are, in process of time, betrayed into downright crimes. Such may be the conclusion of those, who, like the young ruler before us, with many amiable and promising dispositions, had begun their career in life.

III. Such persons are not prepared for sustaining, with propriety and dignity, the distresses to which our state is liable. They were equipped for the season of sunshine and serenity: but, when the sky is overcast, and the days of darkness come, their feeble minds are destitute of shelter, and ill provided for defence. Then is the time, when more hardy qualities are required—when courage must face danger, constancy support pain, patience possess itself in the midst of discouragements, magnanimity display its contempt of threatenings. If those high virtues be altogether strangers to the mind, the mild and gentle will certainly sink under the torrent of disasters. The ruler in the text could plead, that his behaviour to others, in the course of social life, had been unexceptionable. So far, the reflexion on his conduct would afford him comfort amidst adversity. But no man is without failings. In the dejecting season of trouble, it will occur to every one, that he has been guilty of frequent transgression; that much of what ought to have been done, was neglected; and that much of what has been done, had better have been omitted. In such situations, when a thousand apprehensions arise to alarm

conscience, nothing is able to quiet its uneasiness, except a well-grounded trust in the mercy and acceptance of Heaven. It is firm religious principle, acting upon a manly and enlightened mind, that gives dignity to the character, and composure to the heart, under all the troubles of the world. This enables the brave and virtuous man, with success to buffet the storm. While he, who had once sparkled in society, with all the charms of gay vivacity, and had been the delight of every circle in which he was engaged, remains dispirited, overwhelmed, and annihilated, in the evil day.

Such are the failings incident to persons of mixed and imperfect goodness, such the defects of a character formed merely of the amiable, without the estimable qualities of man.

It appears from this, that we must not place too much trust in the fair appearances, which a character may at first exhibit. In judging of others, let us always think the best, and employ the spirit of charity and candour. But in judging of ourselves, we ought to be more severe. Let us remember him, whom our Lord beheld, and *loved*; and who yet fell short of the kingdom of heaven. Let us not forget, that something more than gentleness and modesty, than complacency of temper and affability of manners, is requisite to form a worthy man, or a true christian. To a high place in our esteem, these qualities are justly entitled. They enter essentially into every good man's character. They form some of its most favourable distinctions. But they constitute a part of it—not the whole. Let us not, therefore, rest on them entirely, when we conceive an idea of what manner of persons we ought to be.

Let piety form the basis of firm and established virtue. If this be wanting, the character cannot be sound and entire. Moral virtue will always be endangered, often be overthrown, when it is separat-

ed from its surest support. Confidence in God, strengthened by faith in the great Redeemer of mankind, not only, amidst the severer trials of virtue, gives constancy to the mind, but, by nourishing the hope of immortality, adds warmth and elevation to the affections. They, whose conduct is not animated by religious principle, are deprived of the most powerful incentive to worthy and honourable deeds.

Let such discipline, next, be studied, as may form us to the active and manly virtues. To natural good affections, we can never entirely trust our conduct. These, as has been shown, may sometimes be warped into what is wrong; and often will prove insufficient, for carrying us rightly through all the duties of life. Good affections are highly valuable: but they must be supported by fixed principles, cultivated in the understanding, and rooted in the heart. Habits must be acquired, of temperance and self-denial, that we may be able to resist pleasure, and endure pain, when either of them interfere with our duty; that we may be prepared to make a sacrifice of any worldly interest, when the voice of God and conscience demand it. Let us always remember, that without fortitude of mind, there is no manhood; there can be no perseverance in virtue. Let a secret and inviolable regard for truth reign in our whole behaviour. Let us be distinguished for fidelity to every promise we have made—and for constancy in every worthy friendship we have formed. Let no weak complaisance, no undue regard to the opinions of men, ever make us betray the rights of conscience. What we have once, upon due consideration, adopted as rules of conduct, to these let us adhere unshaken. However the world may change around us, let it find us the same in prosperity and adversity—faithful to God and virtue—faithful to the convictions of our own heart. What our lot in the world may be, is not

ours to foresee or determine. But it is ours to resolve, that whatever it shall be, it shall find us persevering in one line of uprightnes and honour.

By such discipline, such attentions as these, we are to guard against those failings, which are sometimes found to stain the most engaging characters. Joining in proper union the amiable and the estimable qualities—by the one we shall attract the good—and by the other command respect from the bad. We shall both secure our own integrity, and shall exhibit to others a proper view of what virtue is, in its native grace and majesty. In one part of our character, we shall resemble the flower that smiles in spring; in another, the firmly-rooted tree, that braves the winter storm. For, remember we must, that there is a season of winter, as well as of spring and summer, in human life: and it concerns us to be equally prepared for both.

A higher and more perfect example of such a character as I now recommend, cannot be found, than what is presented to us in the life of Jesus Christ. In him, we behold all that is gentle, united with all that is respectable. It is a remarkable expression, which the apostle Paul employs concerning him: *I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ* *. Well might these qualities be singled out, as those for which he was known and distinguished. We see him in his whole behaviour affable, courteous, and easy of access. He conversed familiarly with all who presented themselves, and despised not the meanest. With all the infirmities of his disciples he calmly bore: and his rebukes were mild, when their provocations were great. He wept over the calamities of his country, which persecuted him; and apologised and prayed for them who put him to death. Yet the same Jesus we behold, awful in the strictness of his virtue—inflexible in the cause of truth—uncomplying with prevailing man-

* 2 Cor. x. 1.

ners, when he found them corrupt—setting his face boldly against the hypocritical leaders of the people—over-awed by none of their threatenings—in the most indignant terms, reproving their vices, and stigmatizing their characters. We behold him gentle, without being tame—firm without being stern—courageous without being violent. *Let this mind be in us, which was also in Jesus Christ; and we shall attain to honour, both with God and with man.*



S E R M O N XLV.

*On the SACRAMENT of the LORD'S SUPPER, as a
PREPARATION for DEATH.*

Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.



MATTHEW, xxvi. 29.

But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom.

WITH these words of our blessed Lord, the Evangelist concludes his account of the institution of the sacrament of the supper. It is an institution, which, solemn and venerable in itself, is rendered still more so, by the circumstances which accompanied it. Our Lord had now, for about three years, continued to appear in his public character, in the land of Judea. He had, all along, been watched with a jealous eye, by his enemies: and the time was come, when they were to prevail against him. A few friends he had, from the beginning, selected, who, in every vicissitude of his

state, remained faithfully attached to him. With these friends he was now meeting for the last time, on the very evening in which he was betrayed and seized. He perfectly knew all that was to befall him. He knew that this was the last meal, in which he was to join with those, who had been the companions of all his labours, the confidants of all his griefs; among whom he had passed all the quiet and private moments of his life. He knew, that within a few hours, he was to be torn from this loved society, by a band of ruffians; and, by to-morrow, was to be publicly arraigned, as a malefactor. With a heart melting with tenderness, he said to the twelve apostles, as he sat down with them at table. *With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer* *. And then, having gratified himself for the last time in their society, and having instituted that commemoration of his death, which was to continue in the christian church until the end of ages, he took a solemn and affectionate farewell of his friends in the words of the text, *I say unto you, that I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom.*

As these words were uttered by our Lord, in the prospect of his sufferings—when preparing himself for death, and looking forward to a future meeting with his friends in heaven—let us, under this view, consider the sacrament which he then instituted, as a preparation for all the sufferings of life, and, especially, a preparation for death. It is fit and proper, that such solemn prospects should enter into the service which we are this day to perform. We have no reason to imagine, that they will render it a gloomy service. A good and wise man is often disposed to look forward to the termination of life. The number of our days is determined by God: and certainly it will not tend to shorten their number,

* Luke, xxii. 15.

that we employ ourselves in preparing for death. On the contrary, while our days last, it will tend to make us pass them more comfortably, and more wisely. Let us now, then, as if for the last time we were to partake of this sacrament, consider how it may serve to prepare us for the dying hour.

I. It is a high exercise of all those dispositions and affections, in which a good man would wish to die. He would surely wish to leave this world, in the spirit of devotion towards God, and of fellowship and charity with all his brethren on earth. Now, these are the very sentiments, which the sacrament of the Lord's supper inspires into the heart of every pious communicant. It includes the highest acts of devotion of which human nature is capable. It imports a lively sense of the infinite mercies of heaven—of the gratitude we owe to that God, who, by the death of his Son, hath restored the forfeited happiness and hopes of the human race. It imports the consecration of the soul to God—the entire resignation of ourselves, and all our concerns, into his hands, as to the God whom we serve and love—the guardian in whom we confide. *To thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy. I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear, I will worship towards thy holy temple* *.

These devout affections towards God, are, on this occasion, necessarily accompanied with benevolent dispositions towards men. Our communion is not only with God, but with one another. In this solemn service, the distinction of ranks is abolished. We assemble in common before our great Lord, professing ourselves to be all members of his family, and the children of the same Father. No feud, nor strife, nor enmity, is permitted to approach the sacred table. All within that hallowed space, breathes peace, and concord, and love. *If*

* Psalm, xliii. 4; v. 7.

thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother; and then come and offer thy gift*. What can be more becoming men and christians, than such sentiments of piety to the great Father of the universe—gratitude to the merciful redeemer of mankind—and charity and forgiveness towards all our brethren? Is not this the temper in which a good man would wish to live? more especially, is not this the frame of mind which will give both dignity and peace to his last moments? How discomposed and embittered will these important moments prove, if, with a mind soured by the remembrance of unforgiven injuries, with a breast rankled by enmity, with a heart alienated from God, and insensible to devotion, one be forced away from life?

Contemplate the manner in which our blessed Lord died; which the service of this day brings particularly into your view. You behold him, amidst the extremity of pain, calm and collected within himself—possessing his spirit with all the serenity, which sublime devotion and exalted benevolence inspire. You hear him, first, lamenting the fate of his unhappy country; next, when he was fastened to the cross, addressing words of consolation to his afflicted parent; and, lastly, sending up prayers, mixed with compassionate apologies, for those who were shedding his blood. After all those exercises of charity, you behold him in an act of devout adoration and trust, resigning his breath; *Father into thy hands I commend my spirit.* Can any death be pronounced unhappy, how distressful soever its circumstances may be, which is thus supported, and dignified? What could we wish for more, in our last moments, than with this peaceful frame of mind, this calm of all the affections, this exalta-

* Matthew, v. 23, 24.

tion of heart towards God, this diffusion of benevolence towards men, to bid adieu to the world?

If, in such a spirit as this, we would all wish to die, let us think, that now is the time to prepare for it, by seasonably cultivating this spirit while we live—by imbibing, in particular, from the holy sacrament, those dispositions and affections which we would wish to possess at our latest period. It is altogether vain to imagine, that when the hour of death approaches, we shall be able to form ourselves into the frame of mind which is then most proper and decent. Amidst the struggles of nature, and under the load of sickness or pain, it is not time for unaccustomed exertions to be made, or for new reformation to be begun. *Sufficient, and more than sufficient, for that day, is the evil thereof.* It will be too late to assume then the hero, or the saint, if we have been totally unacquainted with the character before. The sentiments we would display, and the language we would utter, will be alien and strange to us. They will be forced, and foreign to the heart. It is only in consequence of habits acquired in former and better days, that a temper of piety and charity can grow up into such strength, as to confer peace and magnanimity on the concluding hours of life. Peculiarly favourable to the acquisition of such a temper, are the devotions of this day. In this view, let us perform them; and study to be, at the table of the Lord, what we would wish to be when the summons of death shall come.

II. This sacrament becomes a preparation for death, by laying a foundation for peace with God. What is important at the close of life, is not only the temper in which we leave the world, but the situation in which we stand with respect to that great Judge, before whom we are about to appear. This view of our situation is apt to escape us, during the ordinary course of life. Occupied with

the affairs and concerns of this world—flattered by those illusive colours of innocence and virtue, in which self-love dresses up our character, apprehensions of guilt create little uneasiness to the multitude of men. But, on the approach of death, their ideas change. As the inquisition of the Supreme Judge draws nigh, remembered transgressions crowd upon the mind: guilt becomes strongly realised to the imagination; and alarms, before unknown, begin to arise. Hence that anxiety, in the prospect of a future invisible world, which is so often seen to attend the bed of death. Hence those various methods, which superstition has devised for quieting this anxiety—the trembling mind eagerly grasping every feeble plank on which it can lay hold—and flying for protection to the most unavailing aid. The stoutest spirits have been then known to bend; the proudest hearts to be humbled. They who are now most thoughtless about their spiritual concerns, may, perhaps, be in this state before they die.

The dispensation of grace, discovered in the gospel, affords the only remedy against those terrors, by the promise of pardon, extended to the penitent, through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the very essence of this sacrament, to exhibit this promised grace to mankind; *My body which was broken for you; my blood shed for many, for the remission of sins.* Here, shines from above the ray of hope. Divine justice, we are assured, is not inexorable. Divine mercy is accessible, to all who believe and repent. The participation of this sacrament, therefore, naturally imparts comfort to the worthy communicant; as it supposes, on his part, a cordial compliance with those terms, on which pardon is offered by the gospel to mankind.

I mean not to say, that the participation of this sacrament, how pious and proper soever our dispositions at the time may be, is, of itself, sufficient to insure us of comfort at death. It were unwar-

rantable to flatter christians, with hopes to this extent. No single act of the most fervent devotion can afford assured hopes of peace with Heaven, until these hopes be confirmed by the succeeding tenor of a good life. But what may safely be asserted is, that communicating in a proper manner, makes way for such hopes. It is an introduction to that state of reconciliation with God, which will give you peace in death. It is the beginning of a good course, which, if duly pursued, will make your latter end blessed. It is the entrance of *the path of the just—the morning of that light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* For this holy sacrament is a professed renunciation of the vices and corruptions of the world. It is a professed dereliction of former evil habits—a solemn return, on our part, to God and virtue, under the firm trust, that God will, through Jesus Christ, show mercy to the frailties of the penitent. If you continue to support the character which you this day assume, the invisible world will no longer present to you a scene of terrors. You will be comforted with the view of goodness and compassion, as predominant in the administration of the universe. After having finished a virtuous course, you will be able to look up to that God, whom you have worshipped, and to say: *I know in whom I have trusted. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me.*

III. This sacrament prepares us for a happy death, by strengthening the connexion between christians, and Christ their Saviour. This is a connexion which, in various ways, redounds to their benefit; and will be found particularly consolatory at the hour of death. The awful Majesty of heaven is in danger of overwhelming the mind, in the feeble moments of departing life. The reverence it inspires is mingled with sensations of dread, which

might be too strong for us then to bear. When we look up to it, through a Mediator and Intercessor, that Majesty assumes a milder aspect, and appears to invite our approach. Whatever, therefore, forms a connexion with this great Mediator, this powerful friend and patron of the human race, must be most desirable to every one, especially to the dying man. Now, this sacrament unites us closely with him. It is the oath of our allegiance. It is the act of enlisting ourselves under the banner of this divine Leader. Of course it strengthens our faith in him, as our guide through life, and our guardian and protector in death. It gives us a title to look up to him, under the confidence of that reciprocal engagement, which fidelity on the one hand is always understood to imply, of protection on the other.

His participation of our nature conveys a degree of encouragement, which we could derive from no being altogether celestial, how gracious or benign soever. In our utmost extremity, we can have recourse to his sympathizing aid, who had experience both of the distresses of life, and of the terrors of death. We behold, in the text, with what firm tranquillity he looked forward to his approaching sufferings. Sincere attachment to our great Master, may be expected to infuse into us some degree of the same happy composure of mind. It is owing to our losing out of view this perfect model—to our following the crowd, and adopting the common spirit of the world—that we become mean-spirited and base—servilely attached to life, and afraid to die. Did we according to our engagements at the Lord's table, keep our eye fixed on our divine Leader, and study to follow his steps, a portion of his spirit would descend upon us at the hour of death. It would be as the mantle of Elijah, falling on a chosen disciple; and would enable us, as it did Elijah of old, to smite, and divide the waters. We believe

our Saviour now to rule in the world of spirits. The grave, therefore, bars not his followers from access to him. In the grave, for our sake, he once lay down, that he might dispel the gloom, which appears to us to cover that formidable mansion. In a short time, he arose from it, in order to assure us, that the dark and narrow house was not to confine his followers forever. By his death, he conquered death, and him that had the power of it: and his voice to us is, *Because I live, ye shall live also.* Hence, as long as we preserve that attachment to him, which we this day profess, we are furnished with a variety of considerations, proper for supporting us in the prospect of our dissolution. This leads me to observe,

IV. That the sacrament, of which we are to partake, prepares us for death, by confirming and enlivening our hope of immortality. In this sacrament, my friends, you act for both worlds. As inhabitants of the earth, you are on this day to look forward, with care, to your future behaviour in it. For you are not, by any means, disengaging yourselves totally from this life and its concerns. On the contrary, you are forming, and even strengthening, those connexions, which virtue requires you to maintain with your friends, and fellow-creatures around you. At the same time, you are not to consider yourselves as citizens of this earth only, but also as citizens of heaven. You are to recognise, on this occasion, your relation to a higher and better country, with which you are connected by the most sacred ties; and from which you derive those comforts and hopes, that will both purify your life, and render your death happy. The sacrament of the supper is, in this view, an ascent of the mind above terrestrial things. At the Lord's table, we associate ourselves, in some degree, with spirits of a more exalted order. We declare, that we are tending towards their society; and have fixed our final rest

within the veil. This view of the institution, so comfortable to the last period of life, is plainly given us in the words of the text. For it is worthy of particular observation, that, as soon as our Lord had instituted this sacrament, he straightway leads the thoughts of his disciples to a state of future existence. Employing that metaphorical style, which the occasion naturally suggested, he tells them, that though he was not henceforth to drink of the fruit of the vine on earth, yet a day was coming, when he was again to drink it *with them*—to drink it, *in his Father's kingdom*. Two distinct ideas are, in these words, presented to us. One is, the abode into which our Saviour was to remove—*his Father's kingdom*. The other, the society which he was there to enjoy—*with you, in my Father's kingdom*. These correspond to the two views, under which death is most formidable to men; both of which he intended to banish, by the institution of this sacrament: first, that death is a transition to a new and unknown world; and next, that it is a final separation from all the friends whom we have loved on earth.

First; if death terminates our existence here, the abode, to which it translates the faithful followers of Christ, is the kingdom of his Father. The institution of this sacrament dispels all the gloomy ideas of annihilation, of non-existence, of total darkness, which our imagination is ready to associate with the grave. We are here assured that to good men, death is not the close of being, but a change of state—a removal from a distant and obscure province of the universe, into the city of God, the chief seat of their Father's kingdom. They have every reason to believe, that the objects, which are to meet them there, how new and unknown soever, shall all be propitious and friendly. For into the kingdom of his Father, their Lord has declared, that he is entered as their *forerunner*. *I go to my Father, and your Father—to my God, and your God.* In

298 *On the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper,*
my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a
place for you. I will come again, and receive you to myself,
that where I am, there ye may be also. What reason-
ings, what speculations, can have power to impart
so much peace to the dying man, as a promise so
direct and explicit, coming from him who is truth
itself, and cannot lie? *If it were not so, I would have*
told you *. The prospect becomes still more cheering
and relieving, when we include

The other circumstance mentioned in the text—
the society to be enjoyed in that future state of be-
ing. *With you, I shall drink of the fruit of the vine in*
my Father's kingdom. In how amiable a light does
our Saviour here appear, looking forward to a fu-
ture re-union with those beloved friends, whom he
was now leaving, as to a circumstance which should
increase both his own felicity and theirs, when they
met again in a happier world! Thus, in the most
affectionate manner, cheering their drooping and
dejected spirits—and, by a similar prospect, provi-
ding for the comfort of his followers in future ge-
nerations, when they should be about to leave the
world.

The expressions in the text plainly suggest a joy-
ful intercourse among friends, who had been sepa-
rated by death; and therefore seem to give much
confirmation, to what has always been a favourite
hope of good men; that friends shall know and re-
cognise each other, and renew their former con-
nexions, in a future state of existence. How many
pleasing prospects, does such an intimation open to
the mind! How much does it tend to compensate
the vanity of life, and to mitigate the sorrows of
death! For it is not to be denied, that one of the
most bitter circumstances attending death, is the
final separation from beloved friends. This is apt
equally to wring the hearts of the dying, and the
surviving: and it is an anguish of that sort, which

* John, xiv. 2.

descends most deeply into the virtuous and worthy breast. When, surrounded with an affectionate family, and weeping friends, a good man is taking his last adieu of all whom he held most dear on earth—when, with a feeble voice, he is giving them his blessing, before he leaves them forever—when, for the last time, he beholds the countenance, he touches the hand, he hears the voice, of the person nearest his heart—who could bear this bitterness of grief, if no support were to be ministered by religious hope—if there were no voice to whisper to our spirits, that hereafter we, and those whom we love, shall meet again in a more blissful land? What higher view can possibly be given, of the benefit resulting from this divine institution, than its affording us consolation in such situations of extreme distress, by realising to our souls the belief of an immortal state, in which all the virtuous and worthy shall be re-united in the presence of their common Lord?

Thus I have set before you many considerations, arising from the sacrament of our Lord's supper, which render it a proper preparation, not only for a good life, but for a comfortable and happy death. The great improvement to be made of the subject is, to bring to the altar of God such dispositions of heart, as may give us ground to hope for this blessed effect. Let us approach to the sacrament with the same seriousness of frame, as if it were the last time we were ever to partake of it—as if we were now making provision for a journey to that land whence none return—as if we were never to *drink*, in this manner, *of the fruit of the vine until that day when we drink it*, with those whom we have loved, *in our Father's kingdom*. God only knows to whom this may be truly spoken! God knows who, of this assembly, shall never have opportunity to approach again to the sacred table, and to meet with their brethren, on such an occasion, in the courts of the Lord's house! Whatever our doom is to be, whe-

ther we are appointed for life or for death, such is the frame of mind which now best becomes, and will most improve us, in partaking of the holy sacrament.

Let me caution you, before I conclude, against judging of the propriety of your disposition in this solemn act of worship, solely by the warmth of your affections, and the fervour of your devotion. This state of heart, how desirable soever it may be, cannot be at all times possessed. It depends in some measure, on natural sensibility. All are not equally endowed with warm and tender feelings. Even they, who are susceptible of the highest degrees of pious and virtuous sensibility, cannot, on every occasion, command that happy temperature of mind. We are not, therefore, to judge unfavourably of ourselves, if this be not always the privilege of our devotions. It is chiefly a sedate and composed frame of spirit, that we must study to cultivate—arising from grave and sober thoughts—from serious and penitent recollection of past errors—from good purposes for the future—and from a deep sense of the approaching events of death and immortality. Penetrated with such dispositions, you have ground to come to the altar of God with humble trust and joy—under the belief, that you are approaching, through the great Redeemer, to that merciful Creator, to whom, *in the high and holy place of eternity*, the devout aspirations of his servants on earth, are ever acceptable and pleasing.

S E R M O N XLVI.

On the USE and ABUSE of the WORLD.

I CORINTHIANS, vii. 31.

They that use this world, as not abusing it.

THE world is always represented in scripture as the great scene of trial to a christian. It sets before him a variety of duties, which are incumbent on him to perform; and, at the same time, surrounds him with many dangers, against which he has to guard. The part which is proper for him to act, may be comprised in these two expressive words of the text—*using the world and not abusing it*—the significancy and extent of which, I purpose now to explain. The subject is of the higher importance, as in the world we must live; and according as we use, or abuse it, it will prove either our friend or our greatest foe.

It is natural to begin with observing, that the christian is here supposed to *use the world*; by which we must certainly understand the apostle to mean, maintaining intercourse and connexion with the world; living in it, as one of the members of human society; assuming that rank which belongs to his station. No one can be said to *use the world*, who lives not thus. Hence it follows, that sequestration from the world is no part of christian duty; and it appears strange, that even among those who approve not of monastic confinement, seclusion from the pleasures of society should have been sometimes considered, as belonging to the character of a religious man. They have been supposed to be the best

servants of God, who, consecrating their time to the exercises of devotion, mingle least in the ordinary commerce of the world; and especially who abstain most rigidly from all that has the appearance of amusement. But how pious and sincere soever the intentions of such persons may be, they certainly take not the properest method, either for improving themselves, or for advancing religion among others. For this is not using the world, but relinquishing it. Instead of making the light of a good example shine with useful splendour throughout the circle of society, they confine it within a narrow compass. According to the metaphor employed by our Saviour, after *the candle is lighted, they put it under a bushel*. Instead of recommending religion to the world, they exhibit it under the forbidding aspect of unnecessary austerity. Instead of employing their influence, to regulate and temper the pleasures of the world, by a moderate participation of those that are innocent, they deliver up all the entertainments of society, into the hands of the loose and giddy.

The various dangers, which the world presents to one who is desirous of maintaining his piety and integrity, have given rise to this scrupulous caution concerning the use of the world; and so far, the principle is commendable. But we must remember, that the virtue of a christian is to be shown, in surmounting dangers which he is called to encounter. Into the post of danger we were ordered by Providence, when we were brought into this world. We were placed as soldiers, on the field of battle. It is there, that our fidelity to our great Commander must appear. The most signal virtues, which adorn and improve the human character, are displayed in active life. There, the strength of the mind is brought forth, and put to the test. There, all the amiable dispositions of the heart find their proper exercise; humanity is cultivated; patience, forti-

tude, and self-denial, come forward in all their forms; and the light of good men's works so shines before others, as to lead them to *glorify their Father which is in heaven.*

It may be assumed, therefore, as a principle justified by the text, and by the whole strain of scripture, that *to use*, and, in a certain degree, to enjoy *the world*, is altogether consistent with religion. According to the rank which men possess in society, according to their age, their employment, and connexions, their intercourse with the world will be more or less extended. In private life, they use the world with propriety, who are active and industrious in their callings—just and upright in their dealings—sober, contented, and cheerful in their station. When the circumstances of men allow them a wider command of the enjoyments of the world, of those enjoyments they may freely partake, within the bounds of temperance, moderation, and decency. The highest situations of rank and opulence, ought to be distinguished by dignity of character; by extensive beneficence, usefulness, and public spirit; by magnificence, without ostentation; and generous hospitality, without profusion.

We shall have a clearer view of the proper use of the world, when we contrast it with that abuse of the world, which we too often observe. Those abuses manifest themselves in various forms; but in general may be classed under three great heads.

I. They are abusers of the world, who intemperately give themselves up to its pleasures, and lead a life of licentiousness, riot, and dissipation. Amidst the wealth and luxury of the present age, it will be admitted, that persons of this description are not unfrequent, who, being opulent in fortune, and perhaps high in rank, think themselves entitled to pass their days in a careless manner, without any other object in view, than the gratification of their senses and passions. It shall be granted, that they are not

obliged to that exact economy and attention in their manner of living, which the state of fortune may require of others. Gaiety shall be permitted to them—change of scene, and variety of amusements. But let them not forget, that as men and members of society, not to say professors of the christian faith, they are bound to stop short in their career of pleasure, as soon as it becomes disgraceful to themselves, and hurtful to the world. By the train of life which they lead, they defeat every purpose for which Providence bestowed on them the blessings of prosperity. They sink every talent which they possess, into useless insignificancy. They corrupt the public manners by their example; and diffuse among others the spirit of extravagance and folly. They behave in a manner altogether unsuitable to the condition of the world in which we live; where we are exposed to so much change, surrounded with so much distress, and daily behold so many affecting scenes, as ought to awaken serious reflexion, and chasten dissolute mirth.

With indignant eyes, the sober and thinking part of mankind, view the luxury and riot of those abusers of the world. To them are owing the discontents of the poor, their disaffection to their superiors, their proneness to disturb the peace of the world. When the poor behold wealth properly used, they look up with respect to them who possess it. They rest contented in their station; and bless the just and generous, from whose munificence they receive employment and reward. But when they behold those men of pleasure, dissipating, in vice and folly, the fortune which their forefathers had honourably earned—when they behold them oppressing all their dependents, merely that they may revel in luxurious extravagance—then their hearts swell within them: with murmurs of fullen grief, they eye their own mean habitation, and needy family; and be-

come prepared for robbery, tumult, sedition, and every evil work.

The conduct of such abusers of the world, is not only pernicious to the welfare of society, and to the interests of virtue; it is equally ruinous to themselves. I shall not insist on the loss of reputation, the waste of fortune, the broken health, and debilitated frame, which are the well-known consequences of a life of intemperate pleasure. I shall not recount all the better and more substantial enjoyments which they forfeit. Amidst the turbulence of riot, and the fumes of intoxication, unknown to them are the rational entertainments of regular life; the enjoyment of the face of nature; the pleasures of knowledge, and an improved mind; the pleasures of private friendship, and domestic society; the conscious satisfaction which accompanies honourable labours, and the justly-acquired esteem of those who surround them. All these they have thrown away; and in their room have substituted, what they think more high and vivid pleasures. But of what nature are those pleasures? *Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness*.*"

At the bottom of the hearts of all men, there lies a secret sense of propriety, virtue and honour. This sense may be so far blunted, as to lose its influence in guiding men to what is right, while yet it retains its power of making them feel that they are acting wrong. Hence remorse often gnaws the heart, which affects to appear light and gay, before the world. Among the crowd of amusements, the voluptuary may endeavour to stifle his uneasiness; but through all his defences it will penetrate. A conscious sense of his own insignificance, when he sees others distinguished for acting a manly and worthy part—reflexion on the time he has wasted, and

* Prov. xiv. 13.

the contempt he has incurred—the galling remembrance of his earlier and better days, when he gave the fair promise of accomplishments, which now are blasted—have frequently been found to sadden the festive hour. The noise of merriment may be heard; but heaviness lies at the heart. While the tabret and the viol play, a melancholy voice sounds in his ears. The wasted estate, the neglected halls, and ruined mansion of his fathers rise to view. The angry countenances of his friends seem to stare him in the face. A hand appears to come forth on the wall, and to write his doom.

Retreat, then, from your dishonourable courses, ye who by licentiousness, extravagance, and vice, are abusers of the world! You are degrading, you are ruining yourselves. You are grossly misemploying the gifts of God; and the giver will not fail to punish. Awake to the pursuits of men of virtue and honour. Break loose from that magic circle, within which you are at present held. Reject the poisoned cup, which the enchantress Pleasure holds up to your lips. Draw aside the veil, which she throws over your eyes. You will then see other objects than you now behold. You will see a dark abyss opening below your feet. You will see virtue and temperance marking out the road, which conducts to true felicity. You will be enabled to discern, that the world is enjoyed to advantage, by none but such as follow those divine guides; and who consider pleasure as the seasoning, but not as the business of life.

II. The world is abused, not only by an intemperate pursuit of its pleasures, but by a sordid attachment to its gains. This respects a set of men of very different description from the former—more decent in their carriage, and less flagrant in their vices—but corrupted by the world in no less a degree. For the world is often abused by the men of business, as much as by the men of pleasure. When

worldly success becomes the sole object of their life—when the accumulation of fortune so engrosses them, as to harden their heart against every feeling of moral obligation—when it renders them insensible to the calls of affection, and to the impressions of piety and religion—they then come under the class of the covetous, whom, it is said, *the Lord abhorreth*.*

The world, with its advantages, is a lawful object of pursuit to a christian. He may seek, by fair industry, to render his circumstances affluent. Without reproof, he may aim at distinction and consideration in the world. He may bestow a considerable portion of his time and attention, on the successful management of his worldly interests. All this is within the limits of that allowable use of the world, to which religion gives its sanction. But to a wise and good man, the world is only a secondary object. He remembers there is an eternity beyond it. His care is, not merely to amass and possess, but to use his possessions well, as one who is accountable to God. He is not a slave either to the hopes, or the fears of the world. He would rather forfeit any present advantage, than obtain it at the expense of violating the divine law, or neglecting his duty. This is using the world like a good man. This is living in it, as a subject of God, and a member of the great community of mankind. To such a man, riches are a blessing. He may enjoy them with magnificence; but he will use them with liberality. They open a wide field to the exercise of his virtue, and allow it to shine with diffusive lustre.

Very opposite to this, is the character of the worldly-minded. To them, the mere attainment of earthly possessions, is an ultimate aim. They cannot be said to *use the world*; for to possess, not to use or enjoy, is their object. They are emphatically said in scripture, to *load themselves with thick*

* Psalm, x. 3.

clay *. Some sort of apology may be framed for them who seek to extract from the world, pleasure of one kind or other. But for those, who know no pleasure, farther than *adding house to house, and field to field*, and calling them their own, it is hardly possible to frame any apology. Such persons are idolaters of the worst kind; for they have made the world their God. They daily worship and bow down before it; and hold nothing to be mean or base, which can promote the enlargement of their fortune.—He is an abuser of the world, let his possession of it be ever so ample, who knows nothing higher than the gains of the world. He is an abuser of the world, who sacrifices probity, virtue, or humanity to its interests. He is an abuser of the world, who, cannot occasionally retreat from it, to consider what character he bears in the sight of God; and to what issue his conduct will bring him at last. In a word, the world is then properly used, when it is generously and beneficently enjoyed—neither hoarded up by avarice, nor squandered by ostentation.

III. The world is abused, by those who employ its advantages to the injury or oppression of their brethren. Under this class are included the worst and most criminal abusers of the world, who turn against their fellow-creatures, those advantages with which it has pleased heaven to distinguish them. It is a class which comprehends the sovereign who tyrannises over his people—the great man who oppresses his dependants—the master who is cruel to his servants—every one in fine, who renders his superiority of any kind, whether of wealth or power, unnecessarily grievous to those who are his inferiors; whose superciliousness dejects the modest; whose insolence tramples on the poor; whose rigour makes the widow and the orphan weep. Persons of this character, while thus abusing the advantages of the world, may, for a while, enjoy their triumph.

* Habakkuk, ii. 6.

But let them not think, their triumph is always to last. Their turn shall come, to be humbled as low as those whom they now oppress. For there is a vigilant eye in the heavens, attentive to observe their procedure. There is an impartial ear, which listens to every just complaint preferred against them. There is an irresistible arm stretched over their heads, whose weight they shall one day feel. The Sovereign of the universe characterises himself, in the sacred writings, as peculiarly an adversary to the insolent and haughty. *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him* *. *I will come near to you in judgment; and I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right* †. *He, that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker* ‡. *The Lord will plead their cause; and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them* §.

After hearing these awful words, is it not strange, O men, at once infatuated and cruel! that you cannot use the world, without abusing it, to the distress of your brethren? Even supposing no punishment to be threatened, no arm to be lifted up against you, is there nothing within you, that relents at the circumstances of those below you in the world? Is it not enough, that they suffer their own hard fate, without its being aggravated, by your severity and oppression? Why must the aged, the poor, and the friendless, tremble at your greatness? Cannot you be happy, unless you make them eat their scanty morsel in bitterness of heart?—You happy! profane not the word—what is such happiness as yours, compared with that of him who could say, *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me: and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. I was a father to the*

* Psalm, xii. 5.

† Prov. xiv. 31.

‡ Malachi, iii. 5.

§ Prov. xxii. 23.

poor. *The blessing of him that was ready to perish, came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy**. How properly did such a man use the world, and with what just honour did he flourish in it! *Unto me men gave ear; they kept silence, and waited for my counsel. The princes refrained talking. The aged arose, and stood up. My root was spread out by the waters: and the dew lay upon my branch.* Not only unknown to you are such pleasures of virtuous prosperity; but, even previous to prepared punishment, be assured, that remorse is approaching to wring your hearts. Of the world, which you now abuse, in a short time nothing shall remain, but the horror arising from remembered crimes. The wages you have detained, the wealth you have squeezed from the needy, shall lie heavy on your souls. The stately buildings which your pride has erected, by means of violence and oppression, shall seem haunted by injured ghosts. *The stone shall cry out of the wall; and the beam out of the timber shall answer it †.* When you lie on the bed of death, the poor, whom you have oppressed, shall appear to you, as gathered together; stretching forth their hands, and lifting up their voices against you, at the tribunal of Heaven. *I have seen the wicked great in power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. But he passed away, and was not. I sought him, but he could not be found. They are brought down to desolation in a moment, and utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image ‡.*

Thus I have shown what it is to use, and what to abuse the world. When, according to our different stations, we enjoy the advantages of the world with propriety and decency—temperate in our pleasures—moderate in our pursuits of interest—mindful of our duty to God, and, at the same time, just, humane, and generous to our brethren; then, and then only, we use the world, as becomes men and

* Job, xxix. 11.—16. † Habak, ii. 11. ‡ Psalm, xxxvii. 25.; lxxiii. 19.

christians. Within these limits, we may safely enjoy all the comforts which the world affords, and our station allows. But if we pass beyond these boundaries, into the regions of disorderly and vicious pleasure, of debasing covetousness, or of oppressive insolence, the world will then serve only to corrupt our minds, and to accelerate our ruin. The licentious, the avaricious, and the insolent, form the three great classes of abusers of the world.

Let not those who are in wealthy and flourishing circumstances, complain of the restraints, which religious doctrines attempt to impose on their enjoyments. For, to what do these restraints amount? To no more than this, that, by their pleasures, they would neither injure themselves, nor injure others. We call not on the young, to relinquish their gaiety—nor on the rich, to forego their opulence—nor on the great, to lay aside their state. We call only on them, not to convert gaiety into licentiousness—not to employ opulence in mere extravagance—nor to abuse greatness for the oppression of their inferiors—while they enjoy the world, not to forget that they are the subjects of God, and are soon to pass into another state. Let the motive, by which the apostle enforces the exhortation in the text, present itself to their thought: *Use this world as not abusing it; for the fashion of the world passeth away.* Its pomp and its pleasures, its riches, magnificence, and glory, are no more than a transient show. Every thing that we here enjoy, changes, decays, and comes to an end. All floats on the surface of a river, which with swift current, is running towards a boundless ocean. Beyond this present scene of things, above these sublunary regions, we are to look for what is permanent and stable. The world passes away; but God, and heaven, and virtue, continue unchangeably the same. We are soon to enter into eternal habitations: and into these, our works

shall follow us. The consequences shall forever remain, of the part which we have acted as good, or bad men—as faithful subjects of God, or as servants of a vain world.

S E R M O N XLVII.

On EXTREMES *in* RELIGIOUS *and* MORAL CONDUCT.

PROVERBS, iv. 27.

Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left.

I *WILL* behave myself wisely, said the psalmist David, *in a perfect way**. Wisdom is no less necessary in religious and moral, than in civil conduct. Unless there be a proper degree of light in the understanding, it will not be enough, that there are good dispositions in the heart. Without regular guidance, they will often err from the right scope. They will be always wavering and unsteady; nay, on some occasions, they may betray us into evil. This is too much verified by that propensity to run into extremes, which so often appears in the behaviour of men. How many have originally set out with good principles and intentions, who, through want of discretion in the application of their principles, have in the end injured themselves, and brought discredit on religion? There is a certain temperate mean, in the observance of which, piety and virtue consist. On each side there lies a dangerous extreme. Bewildering paths open; by deviating into which, men are apt to forfeit all the praise of their

* Psalm, ci. 2.

good intentions, and to finish with reproach, what they had begun with honour. This is the ground of the wise man's exhortation in the text. *Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.* In discoursing from these words, I purpose to point out some of the extremes into which men are apt to run, in religion and morals; and to suggest directions for guarding against them.

With regard to religious principle in general, it may, perhaps, be expected, that I should warn you of the danger of being, on one hand, too rigid in adhering to it; and, on the other hand, too easy in relaxing it. But the distinction between these supposed extremes, I conceive to have no foundation. No man can be too strict, in his adherence to a principle of duty. Here, there is no extreme. All relaxation of principle, is criminal. What conscience dictates, is to be ever obeyed. Its commands are universally sacred. Even though it should be misled, yet, as long as we conceive it to utter the voice of God, in disobeying it, we sin. The error, therefore, to be here avoided, is, not too scrupulous or tender regard to conscience, but too little care to have conscience properly enlightened, with respect to what is matter of duty and of sin. Receive not, without examination, whatever human tradition has consecrated as sacred. Recur, on every occasion, to those great fountains of light and knowledge, which are opened to you in the pure word of God. Distinguish, with care, between the superstitious fancies of men, and the everlasting commandments of God. Exhaust not on trifles that zeal, which ought to be reserved for the weightier matters of the law. Overload not conscience, with what is frivolous and unnecessary.

But when you have once drawn the line, with intelligence and precision, between duty and sin, that line you ought on no occasion to transgress.

Though there is no extreme in the reverence due to conscience, there may undoubtedly be an extreme, in laying too much stress, either on mere principle, or on mere practice. Here we must take particular care, not to *turn to the right hand, nor to the left*; but to *hold faith and a good conscience* united, as the scripture, with great propriety, exhorts us*. The error of resting wholly on faith, or wholly on works, is one of those deductions, which most easily mislead men—under the semblance of piety on the one hand, and of virtue on the other. This is not an error peculiar to our times. It has obtained in every age of the christian church. It has run through all the different modes of false religion. It forms the chief distinction of all the various sects which have divided, and which still continue to divide the church—according as they have leaned most to the side of belief, or to the side of morality.

Did we listen candidly to the voice of scripture, it would guard us against either extreme. The apostle Paul every where testifies, that by no works of our own, we can be justified; and that, *without faith it is impossible to please God*. The apostle James as clearly shows, that faith, if it be unproductive of good works, justifies no man. Between those sentiments, there is no opposition. Faith, without works, is nugatory and insignificant. It is a foundation, without any superstructure raised upon it. It is a fountain, which sends forth no stream—a tree, which neither bears fruit, nor affords shade. Good works, again, without good principles, are a fair, but airy structure—without firmness or stability. They resemble the house built on the sand—the reed, which shakes with every wind. You must join the two in full union, if you would exhi-

* 1 Tim. i. 19.

bit the character of a real christian. He, who sets faith in opposition to morals, or morals in opposition to faith, is equally an enemy to the interests of religion. He holds up to view an imperfect and disfigured form, in the room of what ought to command respect from all beholders. By leaning to one extreme, he is in danger of falling into vice; by the other, of running into impiety.

Whatever the belief of men be, they generally pride themselves in the possession of some good moral qualities. The sense of duty is deeply rooted in the human heart. Without some pretence to virtue, there is no self-esteem: and no man wishes to appear in his own view, as entirely worthless. But as there is a constant strife between the lower and higher parts of our nature, between inclination and principle, this produces much contradiction and inconsistency in conduct. Hence arise most of the extremes, into which men run in their moral behaviour; resting their whole worth on that good quality, to which, by constitution or temper, they are most inclined.

One of the first and most common of those extremes, is, that of placing all virtue, either in justice, on the one hand—or in generosity, on the other. The opposition between these, is most discernable among two different classes of men in society. They who have earned their fortune by a laborious and industrious life, are naturally tenacious of what they have painfully acquired. To justice, they consider themselves as obliged; but to go beyond it in acts of kindness, they consider as superfluous and extravagant. They will not take any advantage of others, which conscience tells them is iniquitous; but neither will they make any allowance for their necessities and wants. They contend, with rigorous exactness, for what is due to themselves. They are satisfied, if no man suffer unjustly by them. That no one is benefited by them, gives

them little concern. Another set of men place their whole merit in generosity and mercy; while to justice and integrity they pay small regard. These are persons generally of higher rank, and of easy fortune. To them, justice appears a sort of vulgar virtue, requisite chiefly in the petty transactions, which those of inferior station carry on with one another. But humanity and liberality, they consider as more refined virtues, which dignify their character, and cover all their failings. They can relent at representations of distress; can bestow with ostentatious generosity; can even occasionally share their wealth with a companion of whom they are fond; while, at the same time, they withhold from others what is due to them; are negligent of their family and their relations; and to the just demands of their creditors give no attention.

Both these classes of men run to a faulty extreme. They divide moral virtue between them. Each takes that part of it only, which suits his temper. Without justice, there is no virtue. But without humanity and mercy, no virtuous character is complete. The one man leans to the extreme of parsimony. The other, to that of profusion. The temper of the one is unfeeling. The sensibility of the other is thoughtless. The one you may in some degree respect; but you cannot love. The other may be loved; but cannot be respected: and it is difficult to say, which character is most defective. We must undoubtedly begin with being just, before we attempt to be generous. At the same time, he, who goes no farther than bare justice, stops at the beginning of virtue. We are commanded to *do justly*; but to *love mercy*. The one virtue regulates our actions. The other improves our heart and affections. Each is equally necessary to the happiness of the world. Justice is the pillar, that upholds the whole fabric of human society. Mercy is the genial ray, which cheers and warms the habitations of

men. The perfection of our social character consists, in properly tempering the two with one another; in holding that middle course, which admits of our being just, without being rigid; and allows us to be generous, without being unjust.

We must next guard against either too great severity, or too great facility of manners. These are extremes, of which we every day behold instances in the world. He who leans to the side of severity, is harsh in his censures, and narrow in his opinions. He cannot condescend to others in things indifferent. He has no allowance to make for human frailty; or for the difference of age, rank, or temper, among mankind. With him, all gaiety is sinful levity; and every amusement is a crime. To this extreme, the admonition of Solomon may be understood to belong: *Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise. Why shouldst thou destroy thyself*?* When this severity of manners is hypocritical, and assumed as a cloak to secret indulgence, it is one of the worst prostitutions of religion. But I now consider it, not as the effect of design, but of natural austerity of temper, and of contracted maxims of conduct. Its influence upon the person himself, is to render him gloomy and sour; upon others, to alienate them both from his society, and his counsels; upon religion, to set it forth as a morose and forbidding principle. The opposite extreme to this is, perhaps, still more dangerous; that of too great facility, and accommodation to the ways of others. The man of this character, partly from indolent weakness, and partly from softness of temper, is disposed to a tame and universal assent. Averse either to contradict or to blame, he goes along with the manners that prevail. He views every character with indulgent eye: and with good dispositions in his breast, and a natural reluctance to profligacy and vice, he is enticed to the commission of evils.

* Eccles. vii. 16.

which he condemns, merely through want of fortitude to oppose others.

Nothing, it must be confessed, in moral conduct, is more difficult, than to avoid turning here, either *to the right hand or to the left*. One of the greatest trials both of wisdom and virtue is, to preserve a just medium, between that harshness of austerity, which disgusts and alienates mankind, and that weakness of good-nature, which opens the door to sinful excess. The one separates us too much from the world. The other connects us too closely with it; and seduces us to *follow the multitude in doing evil*. One who is of the former character, studies too little to be agreeable, in order to render himself useful. He, who is of the latter, by studying too much to be agreeable, forfeits his innocence. If the one hurt religion, by cloathing it in the garb of unnecessary strictness; the other, by unwarrantable compliance, strengthens the power of corruption in the world. The one borders on the character of the pharisee—the other, on that of the sadducee. True religion enjoins us to stand at an equal distance from both; and to pursue the difficult, but honourable aim, of uniting good-nature with fixed religious principle—affable manners, with untainted virtue.

Farther; we run to one extreme, when we condemn altogether the opinions of mankind; to another, when we court their praise too eagerly. The former discovers a high degree of pride and self-conceit. The latter betrays servility of spirit. We are formed by nature and providence, to be connected with one another. No man can stand entirely alone, and independent of all his fellow-creatures. A reasonable regard, therefore, for their esteem and good opinion, is a commendable principle. It flows from humanity; and coincides with the desire of being mutually useful. But if that regard be carried too far, it becomes the source of much cor-

ruption. For in the present state of mankind, the praise of the world often interferes with our acting that steady and conscientious part, which gains the approbation of God. Hence arises the difficulty of drawing a proper line, between the allowable regard for reputation, and the excessive desire of praise. On the one side, and on the other, dangers meet us: and either extreme will be pernicious to virtue.

He, who extinguishes all regard to the sentiments of mankind, suppresses one incentive to honourable deeds; nay, he removes one of the strongest checks on vice. For, where there is no desire of praise, there will be also no sense of reproach and shame: and when this sense is destroyed, the way is paved to open profligacy. On the other hand, he, who is actuated solely by the love of human praise, encroaches on the higher respect which he owes to conscience, and to God. Hence, virtue is often counterfeited; and many a splendid appearance has been exhibited to the world, which had no basis in real principle, or inward affection. Hence, religious truths have been disguised, or unfairly represented, in order to be suited to popular taste. Hence the scribes and pharisees rejected our blessed Lord, *because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.* Turn, therefore, neither to *the right hand nor to the left.* Affect not to despise what the world thinks of your conduct and character; and yet, let not the sentiments of the world entirely rule you. Let a desire of esteem be one motive of your conduct; but let it hold a subordinate place. Measure the regard that is due to the opinions of men, by the degree in which these coincide with the law of God.

Allow me next to suggest, the danger of running to the extreme of anxiety about worldly interests on the one hand, and of negligence on the other. It is hard to say which of these extremes is

fraught with most vice, and most misery. Industry and diligence are unquestionable duties, strictly enforced on all christians : and he, who fails in making suitable provision for his household and family, is pronounced to be *worse than an infidel*. But there are bounds, within which our concern for worldly success must be confined. For anxiety is the certain poison of human life. It debases the mind, and sharpens all the passions. It involves men in perpetual distractions and tormenting cares ; and leads them aside from what ought to be the great scope of human action. Anxiety is, in general, the effect of a covetous temper. Negligence is, commonly the offspring of licentiousness, and always the parent of universal disorder. By anxiety, you render yourselves miserable. By negligence, you too often occasion the ruin of others. The anxious man is the votary of riches ; the negligent man, the votary of pleasure. Each offers his mistaken worship, at the shrine of a false deity ; and each shall reap only such rewards as an idol can bestow—the one sacrificing the enjoyment and improvement of the present, to vain cares about futurity ; the other so totally taken up in enjoying the present, as to store the future with certain miseries. True virtue holds a temperate course between these extremes—neither careless of to-morrow, nor taking too much thought for it—diligent, but not anxious—prudent, but not covetous—attentive to provide comfortable accommodation on earth, but chiefly concerned to *lay up treasures in heaven*.

I shall only warn you further against the extreme, of engaging in a course of life too busy and hurried, or of devoting yourselves to one too retired and unemployed. We are formed for a mixture of action and retreat. Our connexions with society, and the performance of the duties which we owe to one another, necessarily engage us in active life. What we owe to ourselves, requires occasional retirement. For he, who, lives always in the bustle of the world, cannot, it

is to be feared, always preserve his virtue pure. Sentiments of piety will be deprived of that nourishment and support, which they would derive from meditation and devotion. His temper will be often ruffled and disturbed. His passions will be kept too much on the stretch. From the contagious manners, which every where abound, he will not be able to avoid contracting some dangerous infection. On the other hand, he who flies to total retreat, in order either to enjoy ease, or to escape from the temptations of the world, will often find disquiet meeting him in solitude, and the worst temptations arising from within himself. Unoccupied by active and honourable pursuits—unable to devote his whole time to improving thoughts—many an evil passion will start up, and occupy the vacant hour. Sullenness and gloom will be in danger of overwhelming him. Peevish displeasure, and suspicions of mankind, are apt to persecute those who withdraw themselves altogether from the haunts of men. Steer therefore a middle course, between a life oppressed with business on the one hand—and burdened, for the burden is no less, with idleness on the other. Provide for yourselves matter of fair and honest pursuit to afford a proper object to the active powers of the mind. Temper business with serious meditation; and enliven retreat by returns of action and industry.

Thus I have pointed out some of those extremes, into which men are apt to run, by forsaking the line which religion and wisdom have drawn. Many more, I am sensible, might be suggested; for the field is wide, and hardly is there any appearance of piety, virtue, or good conduct, but what the folly of men is apt to push into undue excess, on one or the other side. What I have mentioned, will be sufficient to show the necessity of prudent circumspection, in order to escape the dangers which beset us in this state of trial. Let us study to attain a re-

gular, uniform, consistent character—where nothing that is excessive or disproportioned shall come forward to view—which shall not plume itself with a fair show on one side only, while in other quarters it remains unadorned, and blemished—but, where the different parts of worth and goodness shall appear united, and each shall exert its proper influence on conduct. Thus, *turning neither to the right hand, nor to the left*, we shall, as far as our frailty permits, approach to the perfection of the human character; and shall have reason *not to be ashamed, when we have equal respect to all God's commandments.*

S E R M O N XLVIII.

On SCOFFING at RELIGION.

2 PETER, iii. 3.

There shall come in the last days scoffers.

AS the christian religion is adverse to the inclinations and passions of the corrupted part of mankind, it has been its fate, in every age, to encounter the opposition of various foes. Sometimes, it has undergone the storms of violence and persecution. Sometimes, it has been attacked by the arms of false reasoning, and sophistry. When these have failed of success, it has at other times been exposed to the scoffs of the petulant. Men of light and frivolous minds, who had no comprehension of thought for discerning what is great, and no solidity of judgment for deciding on what is true, have taken upon them to treat religion with contempt, as if it were of no consequence to the world.

They have affected to represent the whole of that venerable fabric, which has so long commanded the respect of mankind—which, for ages, the learned have supported, and the wise have admired—as having no better foundation than the gloomy imagination of fanatics and visionaries. Of this character were those *scoffers*, predicted by the apostle to arise *in the last days*—a prediction which we have seen too often fulfilled. As the false colours, which such men throw on religion are apt to impose on the weak and unwary, let us now examine, whether religion affords any just grounds for the contempt or ridicule of the scoffer. They must be either the doctrines, or the precepts of religion, which he endeavours to hold forth to contempt.

The doctrines of the christian religion are rational and pure. All, that it has revealed, concerning the perfections of God, his moral government and laws, the destination of man, and the rewards and punishments of a future state, is perfectly consonant to the most enlightened reason. In some articles, which transcend the limits of our present faculties, as in what relates to the essence of the Godhead, the fallen state of mankind, and their redemption by Jesus Christ, its doctrines may appear mysterious and dark. Against these, the scoffer has often directed his attacks; as if whatever could not be explained by us, ought upon that account to be exploded as absurd.

It is unnecessary to enter, at present, on any particular defence of these doctrines, as there is one observation, which, if duly weighed, is sufficient to silence the cavils of the scoffer. Is he not compelled to admit, that the whole system of nature around him is full of mystery? What reason, then, had he to suppose, that the doctrines of revelation, proceeding from the same author, were to contain no mysterious obscurity? All that is requisite for the conduct of life, both in nature and in religion, di-

vine wisdom has rendered obvious to all. As nature has afforded us sufficient information concerning what is necessary for our food, our accommodation, and our safety; so religion has plainly instructed us in our duty towards God, and our neighbour. But as soon as we attempt to rise towards objects that lie beyond our immediate sphere of action, our curiosity is checked; and darkness meets us on every side. What the essence is of those material bodies which we see and handle—how a seed grows up into a tree—how man is formed in the womb—or how the mind acts upon the body, after it is formed—are mysteries, of which we can give no more account, than of the most obscure and difficult parts of revelation. We are obliged to admit the existence of the fact, though the explanation of it exceeds our faculties.

After the same manner, in natural religion, questions arise concerning the creation of the world from nothing, the origin of evil under the government of a perfect Being, and the consistency of human liberty with divine prescience, which are of as intricate nature, and of as difficult solution, as any questions in christian theology. We may plainly see, that we are not admitted into the secrets of providence, any more than into the mysteries of the Godhead. In all his ways, the Almighty is a *God that hideth himself. He maketh darkness his pavilion. He holdeth back the face of his throne; and spreadeth a thick cloud upon it.* Instead of its being any objection to revelation, that some of its doctrines are mysterious, it would be much more strange and unaccountable, if no such doctrines were found in it. Had every thing in the christian system been perfectly level to our capacities, this might rather have given ground to a suspicion, of its not proceeding from God; since it would have been then so unlike to what we find, both in the system of the universe, and in the system of natural religion. Where-

as, according as matters now stand, the gospel has the same features, the same general character, with the other two, which are acknowledged to be of divine origin—plain and comprehensible, in what relates to practice—dark and mysterious, in what relates to speculation and belief*. The cavils of the scoffer, therefore, on this head, are so far from having any just foundation, that they only discover his ignorance, and the narrowness of his views.

Let us next proceed to what relates to practice, or the preceptive part of religion. The duties, which religion enjoins us to perform towards God, are those which have ofteneft furnished matter to the scoffs of the licentious. They attempt to represent these as so idle and superfluous, that they could owe their birth to nothing but enthusiasm. For, is not the Deity so far exalted above us, as to receive neither advantage nor pleasure, from our worship? What are our prayers, or our praises, to that infinite mind, who, resting in the full enjoyment of his own beatitude, beholds all his creatures passing before him, only as the insects of a day? What but superstitious terrors could have dictated those forms of homage, and those distinctions of sacred days, in which vulgar minds delight, but which the liberal and enlarged look upon with scorn?

Now, in return to such insults of the scoffer, it might be sufficient to observe, that the united sentiments of mankind, in every age and nation, are against him. Thoughtless as the bulk of men are, and attached only to objects which they see around them—this principle has never been extinguished in their breasts, that to the great Parent of the human race, the universal, though invisible, Benefactor of the world, not only internal reverence, but external homage is due. Whether he need that ho-

* See this argument fully pursued, and placed in a strong light, by the masterly hand of Bishop Butler, in his *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion*.

mage or not, is not the question. It is what, on our part, we undoubtedly owe: and the heart is, with reason, held to be base, which stifles the emotions of gratitude to a benefactor, how independent soever he may be of any returns. True virtue always prompts a public declaration of the grateful sentiments which it feels; and glories in expressing them. Accordingly, over all the earth, crowds of worshippers have assembled to adore, in various forms, the Ruler of the world. In these adorations, the philosopher, the savage, and the faint, have equally joined. None but the cold and unfeeling can look up to that beneficent Being, who is at the head of the universe, without some inclination to pray, or to praise. In vain, therefore, would the scoffer deride, what the loud voice of nature demands and justifies. He erects himself against the general and declared sense of the human race.

But apart from this consideration, I must call on him to attend to one of a still more serious and awful nature. By his licentious ridicule of the duties of piety, and of the institutions of divine worship, he is weakening the power of conscience over men; he is undermining the great pillars of society; he is giving a mortal blow to public order, and public happiness. All these rest on nothing so much, as on the general belief of an all-seeing Witness, and the general veneration of an Almighty Governor. On this belief, and this veneration, is founded the whole obligation of an oath; without which, government could not be administered, nor courts of justice act; controversies could not be determined, nor private property be preserved safe. Our only security against innumerable crimes, to which the restraints of human laws cannot reach, is the dread of an invisible avenger, and of those future punishments which he hath prepared for the guilty. Remove this dread from the minds of men;

and you strengthen the hands of the wicked, and endanger the safety of human society.

But how could impressions so necessary to the public welfare be preserved, if there were no religious assemblies, no sacred institutions, no days set apart for divine worship, in order to be solemn remembrancers to men, of the existence and the dominion of God—and of the future account they have to give of their actions to him? To all ranks of men, the sentiments, which public religion tends to awaken, are salutary and beneficial. But with respect to the inferior classes, it is well known, that the only principles which restrain them from evil, are acquired in the religious assemblies which they frequent. Destitute of the advantages of regular education—ignorant, in great measure, of public laws—unacquainted with those refined ideas of honour and propriety, to which others of more knowledge have been trained—were those sacred temples deserted, to which they now resort, they would be in danger of degenerating into a ferocious race, from whom lawless violence was perpetually to be dreaded.

He, therefore, who treats sacred things with any degree of levity and scorn, is acting the part, perhaps without his seeing or knowing it, of a public enemy to society. He is precisely the *madman* described in the book of proverbs,* *who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death; and saith, am I not in sport?* We shall hear him, at times, complain loudly of the undutifulness of children, of the dishonesty of servants, of the tumults and insolence of the lower ranks; while he himself is, in a great measure, responsible for the disorders of which he complains. By the example which he sets, of contempt for religion, he becomes accessory to the manifold crimes, which that contempt occasions among others. By his scoffing at sacred institutions,

* Prov. xxvi. 18.

he is encouraging the rabble to uproar and violence: he is emboldening the false witnesses to take the name of God in vain: he is, in effect, putting arms into the hands of the highwayman, and letting loose the robber on the streets by night.

We come next to consider that great class of duties, which respect our conduct towards our fellow-creatures. The absolute necessity of these to general welfare is so apparent, as to have secured them, in a great degree, from the attacks of the scoffer. He, who should attempt to turn justice, truth, or honesty, into ridicule, would be avoided by every one. To those, who had any remains of principle, he would be odious. To those, who attended only to their interest, he would appear a dangerous man. But though the social virtues are treated in general as respectable and sacred, there are certain forms and degrees of them, which have not been exempted from the scorn of the unthinking. That extensive generosity, and high public spirit, which prompt a man to sacrifice his own interest, in order to promote some great general good—and that strict and scrupulous integrity, which will not allow one, on any occasion, to depart from the truth—have often been treated with contempt by those who are called men of the world. They who will not stoop to flatter the great—who disdain to comply with prevailing manners, when they judge them to be evil—who refuse to take the smallest advantage of others, in order to procure the greatest benefit for themselves—are represented as persons of romantic character, and visionary notions, unacquainted with the world and unfit to live in it.

Such persons are so far from being liable to any just ridicule, that they are entitled to a degree of respect, which approaches to veneration. For they are, in truth, the great supporters and guardians of public order. The authority of their character overawes the giddy multitude. The weight of

their example retards the progress of corruption; checks that relaxation of morals, which is always too apt to gain ground insensibly, and to make encroachments on every department of society. Accordingly, it is this high generosity of spirit, this inflexible virtue, this regard to principle, superior to all opinion, which has ever marked the characters of those who have eminently distinguished themselves in public life; who have patronised the cause of justice against powerful oppressors; who, in critical times, have supported the falling rights and liberties of men; and have reflected honour on their nation and country. Such persons may have been scoffed at by some among whom they lived: but posterity has done them ample justice; and they are the persons, whose names are recorded to future ages, and who are thought and spoken of with admiration.

The mere temporizer, the man of accommodating principles, and inferior virtue, may support a plausible character for a while among his friends and followers: but as soon as the hollowness of his principles is detected, he sinks into contempt. They, who are prone to deride men of inflexible integrity, only betray the littleness of their minds. They show, that they understand not the sublime of virtue; that they have no discernment of the true excellence of man. By affecting to throw any discouragement on purity and strictness of morals, they not only expose themselves to just contempt, but propagate sentiments very dangerous to society. For, if we loosen the regard due to virtue in any of its parts, we begin to sap the whole of it. No man, as it has been often said, becomes entirely profligate at once. He deviates, step by step, from conscience. If the loose casuistry of the scoffer were to prevail, open dishonesty, falsehood, and treachery, would speedily grow out of those complying principles, those relaxations of virtue, which he

would represent to be necessary for every man who knows the world.

The last class of virtues I am to mention, are those which are of a personal nature, and which respect the government to be exercised over our pleasures and passions. Here, the scoffer has always considered himself as having an ample field. Often, and often, have such virtues as sobriety, temperance, modesty, and chastity, been made the subject of ridicule, as monkish habits, which exclude men from the company of the fashionable and the gay—habits, which are the effect of low education, or of mean spirits, or of mere feebleness of constitution; while scoffers, *walking*, as it is too truly said of them by the apostle, *after their lusts*, boast of their own manners as liberal and free, as manly and spirited. They fancy themselves raised thereby much above the crowd; and hold all those in contempt, who confine themselves within the vulgar bounds of regular and orderly life.

Infatuated men! who see not, that the virtues of which they make sport, not only derive their authority from the laws of God, but are moreover essentially requisite both to public and to private happiness. By the indulgence of their licentious pleasures for a while, as long as youth and vigour remain, a few passing gratifications may be obtained. But what are the consequences? Suppose any individual to persevere, unrestrained, in this course, it is certainly to be followed by disrepute in his character, and disorder in his affairs—by a wasted and broken constitution, and a speedy and miserable old age. Suppose a society to be wholly formed of such persons as the scoffers applaud; suppose it to be filled with none but those whom they call the sons of pleasure: that is, with the intemperate, the riotous, and dissolute, among whom all regard to sobriety, decency, and private virtue, was abolished; what an odious scene would such a society exhibit? How

unlike any civilised or well ordered state, in which mankind have chosen to dwell? What turbulence and uproar, what contests and quarrels, would perpetually reign in it? What man of common understanding would not rather choose to dwell in a desert, than to be associated for life with such companions? Shall, then, the scoffer presume to make light of those virtues, without which there could be neither peace nor comfort, nor good order, among mankind?

Let him be desired to think, of his domestic situation and connexions. Is he a father, a husband, or a brother? Has he any friend or relation, male or female, in whose happiness he is interested? Let us put the question to him, whether he be willing that intemperance, unchastity, or dissipation of any kind, should mark their character? Would he recommend to them such excesses? Would he choose, in their presence, openly, and without disguise, to scoff at the opposite virtues, as of no consequence to their welfare? If even the most licentious shudders at the thought—if, in the midst of his loose pleasures, he be desirous that his own family should remain untainted—let this teach him the value of those private virtues, which, in the hours of dissipation, in the giddiness of his mind, he is ready to contemn. Banish sobriety, temperance, and purity, and you tear up the foundations of all public order, and all domestic quiet. You render every house a divided and miserable abode, resounding with terms of shame, and mutual reproaches of infamy. You leave nothing respectable in the human character. You change the man into a brute.

The conclusion, from all the reasonings which we have now pursued, is, that religion and virtue, in all their forms, either of doctrine or of precept—of piety towards God—integrity towards men, or regularity in private conduct—are so far from affording any grounds of ridicule to the petulant,

that they are entitled to our highest veneration; they are names, which should never be mentioned, but with the utmost honour. It is said in scripture, *Fools make a mock at sin* *. They had better make a mock at pestilence, at war, or famine. With one, who should choose these public calamities for the subject of his sport, you would not be inclined to associate. You would fly from him, as worse than a fool—as a man of distempered mind, from whom you might be in hazard of receiving a sudden blow. Yet certain it is, that, to the great society of mankind, sin is a greater calamity, than either pestilence, or famine, or war. These operate only as occasional causes of misery. But the sins and vices of men are perpetual scourges of the world. Impiety and injustice, fraud and falsehood, intemperance and profligacy, are daily producing mischief and disorder; bringing ruin on individuals; tearing families and communities in pieces; giving rise to a thousand tragical scenes on this unhappy theatre. In proportion as manners are vicious, mankind are unhappy. The perfection of virtue, which reigns in the world above, is the chief source of the perfect blessedness which prevails there.

When, therefore, we observe any tendency to treat religion or morals with disrespect and levity, let us hold it to be a sure indication of a perverted understanding, or a depraved heart. *In the seat of the scorner, let us never sit.* Let us account that wit contaminated which attempts to sport itself on sacred subjects. When the scoffer arises, let us maintain the honour of our God and our Redeemer; and resolutely adhere to the cause of virtue and goodness. *The lips of the wise utter knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near to destruction. Him that honoureth God, God will honour. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and he, that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.*

*. Prov. xiv. 9.

S E R M O N XLIX.

On the CREATION of the WORLD.

GENESIS, i. 1.

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.

SUCH is the commencement of the history of mankind, an æra, to which we must ever look back with solemn awe and veneration. Before the sun and the moon had begun their course—before the sound of the human voice was heard, or the name of man was known—in *the beginning* God created the heaven, and the earth. To a beginning of the world, we are led back by every thing that now exists—by all history, all records, all monuments of antiquity. In tracing the transactions of past ages, we arrive at a period, which clearly indicates the infancy of the human race. We behold the world peopled by degrees. We ascend to the origin of all those useful and necessary arts, without the knowledge of which, mankind could hardly subsist. We discern society and civilization arising from rude beginnings, in every corner of the earth—and gradually advancing to the state in which we now find them: all which afford plain evidence, that there was a period, when mankind began to inhabit and cultivate the earth. What is very remarkable, the most authentic chronology and history of most nations, coincides with the account of Scripture; and makes the period, during which the world has been inhabited by the race of men, not to extend beyond six thousand years.

To the ancient philosophers, creation from nothing appeared an unintelligible idea. They maintained the

eternal existence of matter, which they supposed to be modelled by the sovereign mind of the universe, into the form which the earth now exhibits. But there is nothing in this opinion, which gives it any title to be opposed to the authority of revelation. The doctrine of two self-existent, independent principles, God and matter, the one active, the other passive, is an hypothesis which presents difficulties to human reason, at least as great as the creation of matter from nothing. Adhering, then, to the testimony of Scripture, we believe, that *in the beginning God created*, or from non-existence, brought into being, *the heaven and the earth*.

But though there was a period when this globe, with all that we see upon it, did not exist, we have no reason to think, that the wisdom and power of the Almighty were then without exercise or employment. Boundless is the extent of his dominion. Other globes and worlds, enlightened by other suns, may then have occupied, as they still appear to occupy, the immense regions of space. Numberless orders of beings, to us unknown, people the wide extent of the universe; and afford an endless variety of objects to the ruling care of the great Father of all. At length, in the course and progress of his government, there arrived a period, when this earth was to be called into existence. When the signal moment, predestined from all eternity, was come, the Deity arose in his might; and with a word created the world. What an illustrious moment was that, when, from non-existence, there sprang at once into being, this mighty globe, on which so many millions of creatures now dwell! No preparatory measures were required. No long circuit of means was employed. *He spake; and it was done: He commanded; and it stood fast.* The earth was, at first, *without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.* The Almighty surveyed the dark abyss; and fixed bounds to the several divisions of nature.

He said, *Let there be light; and there was light.* Then appeared the sea, and the dry land. The mountains rose; and the rivers flowed. The sun and moon began their course in the skies. Herbs and plants clothed the ground. The air, the earth, and the waters, were stored with their respective inhabitants. At last, man was made after the image of God. He appeared, walking with countenance erect; and received his Creator's benediction, as the lord of this new world. The Almighty beheld his work, when it was finished; and pronounced it good. Superior beings saw with wonder this new accession to existence. *The morning stars sang together; and all the sons of God shouted for joy* *.

But, on this great work of creation, let us not merely gaze with astonishment. Let us consider how it should affect our conduct, by presenting the divine perfections in a light which is at once edifying and comforting to man. It displays the Creator as supreme in power, in wisdom, and in goodness.

I. As supreme in power. When we consider with how much labour and difficulty human power performs its inconsiderable works—what time it costs to rear them—and how easily, when reared, they are destroyed—the very idea of creating power overwhelms the mind with awe. Let us look around, and survey this stupendous edifice, which we have been admitted to inhabit. Let us think of the extent of the different climates and regions of the earth; of the magnitude of the mountains, and of the expanse of the ocean. Let us conceive that immense globe, which contains them, launched at once from the hand of the Almighty—made to revolve incessantly on its axis, that it might produce the vicissitudes of day and night—thrown forth, at the same time, to run its annual course in perpetual circuits through the heavens; after such a meditation, where is the greatness, where is the Pride of

* Job, xxxviii. 7.

man? Into what total annihilation do we sink, before an omnipotent Being? Who is not disposed to exclaim, *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou shouldst visit him? When compared with thee, all men are vanity; their works are nothing.*—Reverence, and humble adoration ought spontaneously to arise. He, who feels no propensity to worship and adore, is dead to all sense of grandeur and majesty; has extinguished one of the most natural feelings of the human heart. *Know the Lord, that he is God; we are all his people—the workmanship of his hands. Let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*

Of all titles to legislation and rule, none is so evident and direct, as that of a Creator. The conviction is felt in every breast, that he, who gave us being, hath an absolute right to regulate our conduct. This gives a sanction to the precepts of God, which the most hardened dare not controvert. When it is a Creator and a Father that speaks, who would not listen and obey? Are justice and humanity his declared laws; and shall we, whom but yesterday he called from the dust, and whom to-morrow he can reduce into dust again, presume, in contempt of him, to be unjust or inhuman? Are there any little interests of our own, which we dare to erect, in opposition to the pleasure of him who made us? *Fear ye not me, saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it—who stretch forth my hand over the earth, and none hindereth?*

At the same time, the power of a Creator is encouraging as well as awful. While it enforces duty, it inspires confidence under affliction. It brings to view a relation, which imports tenderness and comfort; for it suggests the compassion of a father. In the time of trouble, mankind are led by natural impulse, to fly for aid to him, who knows the weak-

ness of the frame which he has made ; who *remembers we are dust* ; and sees the dangers with which we are environed. “ I am thine ; for thou hast made me : forsake not the work of thine own hands,” is one of the most natural ejaculations of the distressed mind.—How blessed are the virtuous, who can rest under the protection of that powerful arm, which made the earth and the heaven ! The omnipotence, which renders God so awful, is to them a source of joy. In the whole compass of nature, nothing is formidable to them, who firmly repose their trust in the Creator. To them, every noxious power can be rendered harmless ; every threatened evil, if not averted, can be transformed into good. In the Author of nature, they find not only the author of their being, but their protector and defender, the lifter up of their heads. *Happy is he, that hath the God of Jacob for his help ; whose hope is in the Lord his God ; which made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is ; which keepeth truth for ever**.

II. The work of creation is the display of supreme wisdom. It carries no character more conspicuous than this. If from the structure and mechanism of some of the most complicated works of human art, we are led to high admiration of the wisdom of the contriver, what astonishment may fill our minds, when we think of the structure of the universe ! It is not only the stupendous building itself, which excites admiration, but the exquisite skill with which the endless variety of its parts are adapted to their respective purposes. Insomuch, that the study of nature, which, for ages, has employed the lives of so many learned men, and which is still so far from being exhausted, is no other than the study of divine wisdom displayed in the creation. The farther our researches are carried, more striking proofs of it every where meet us. The provision, made for

* Psalm cxlvi. 5, 6.

the constant regularity of the universe, in the disposition of the heavenly bodies, so that in the course of several thousand years, nature should ever exhibit the same useful and grateful variety, in the returns of light and darkness, of summer and winter—and ever furnish food and habitation to all the animals that people the earth—must be a lasting theme of wonder to every reflecting mind.

But they are not only the heavens, that *declare the glory of God, and the firmament that showeth forth his handy work.* In the most inconsiderable, as well as in the most illustrious works of the Creator, consummate art and design appear. There is not a creature that moves, nor a vegetable that grows, but, when minutely examined, furnishes materials of the highest admiration. The same wisdom that placed the sun in the centre of the system, and arranged the several planets around him in their order, has no less shown itself in the provision made for the food and dwelling of every bird that roams the air, and every beast that wanders in the desert—equally great, in the smallest, and in the most magnificent objects—in the star, and in the insect—in the elephant, and in the fly—in the beam that shines from heaven, and in the grass that clothes the ground. Nothing is overlooked. Nothing is carelessly performed. Every thing that exists, is adapted with perfect symmetry to the end for which it was designed. All this infinite variety of particulars must have been present to the mind of the Creator—all beheld with one glance of his eye—all fixed and arranged, from the beginning, in his great design, when he formed the heavens and the earth. Justly may we exclaim with the psalmist, *How excellent, O Lord, is thy name in all the earth! How manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all. No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. It is high; we cannot attain unto it.*

This wisdom, displayed by the Almighty in the

creation, was not intended merely to gratify curiosity, and to raise wonder. It ought to beget profound submission, and pious trust, in every heart. It is not uncommon for many, who speak with rapture of creating wisdom, to be guilty, at the same time, of arraigning the conduct of Providence. In the structure of the universe, they confess that all is goodly and beautiful. But in the government of human affairs, they can see nothing but disorder and confusion. Have they forgotten, that both the one and the other, proceed from the same author? Have they forgotten, that he, who balanced all the heavenly bodies, and adjusted the proportions and limits of nature, is the same who hath allotted them their condition in the world, who distributes the measures of their prosperity and adversity, and fixes *the bounds of their habitation*? If their lot appear to them ill-sorted, and their condition hard and unequal, let them only put the question to their own minds, Whether it be most probable, that the great and wise Creator hath erred in his distribution of human things, or that they have erred, in the judgment which they formed, concerning the lot assigned to them? Can they believe, that the divine Artist, after he had contrived and finished this earth, the habitation of men, with such admirable wisdom, would then throw it out of his hands as a neglected work—would suffer the affairs of its inhabitants to proceed by chance—and would behold them, without concern, running into misrule and disorder? Where were then that consistency of conduct, which we discover in all the works of nature, and which we cannot but ascribe to a perfect Being? My brother! when thy plans are disappointed, and thy heart is ready to despair—when virtue is oppressed, and the wicked prosper around thee, in those moments of disturbance, look up to him who created the heaven and the earth; and confide, that he, who made light to spring from primæval dark-

ness, will make order at last to arise from the seeming confusion of the world.

Had any one beheld the earth in its state of chaos when the elements lay mixed and confused—when the earth *was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep*—would he have believed, that it was presently to become so fair and well-ordered a globe as we now behold—illuminated with the splendor of the sun, and decorated with all the beauty of nature? The same powerful hand, which perfected the work of creation, shall, in due time, disembroil the plans of Providence. Of creation, we can judge more clearly, because it stood forth at once; it was perfect from the beginning. But the course of Providence is progressive. Time is required for the progression to advance; and, before it is finished, we can form no judgment, or at least, a very imperfect one, concerning it. We must wait until the great æra arrive, when the secrets of the universe shall be unfolded—when the divine designs shall be consummated—when Providence shall be brought to the same completion which creation has already attained. Then, we have every reason to believe, that the wise Creator shall appear in the end, to have been the wise and just ruler of the world. Until that period come, let us be contented and patient; let us submit and adore. *Although thou sayest, thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore, trust thou in him* *. This exhortation will receive more force, when we,

III. Consider creation as a display of supreme goodness, no less than of wisdom and power. It is the communication of numberless benefits to all who live, together with existence. Justly is the earth said to be *full of the goodness of the Lord*. Throughout the whole system of things, we behold a manifest tendency to promote the benefit either of the rational, or the animal creation. In some parts

* Job, xxxv. 14.

of nature, this tendency may be less obvious than in others. Objects, which to us seem useless, or hurtful, may sometimes occur; and strange it were, if in so vast and complicated a system, difficulties of this kind should not occasionally present themselves to beings, whose views are so narrow and limited as ours. It is well known, that in proportion as the knowledge of nature has increased among men, these difficulties have diminished. Satisfactory accounts have been given of many perplexing appearances. Useful and proper purposes have been found to be promoted, by objects which were, at first, thought unprofitable or noxious.

Malignant must be the mind of that person—with a distorted eye he must have contemplated creation—who can suspect, that it is not the production of infinite benignity and goodness. How many clear marks of benevolent intention appear, every where around us! What a profusion of beauty and ornament is poured forth on the face of nature! What a magnificent spectacle presented to the view of man! What supply contrived for his wants! What a variety of objects set before him, to gratify his senses, to employ his understanding, to entertain his imagination, to cheer and gladden his heart! Indeed, the very existence of the universe is a standing memorial of the goodness of the Creator. For nothing, except goodness, could originally prompt creation. The supreme Being, self-existent and all-sufficient, had no wants which he could seek to supply. No new accession of felicity or glory was to result to him, from creatures whom he made. It was goodness, communicating and pouring itself forth—goodness, delighting to impart happiness in all its forms, which in the beginning created the heaven and the earth. Hence, those innumerable orders of living creatures with which the earth is peopled; from the lowest class of sensitive being, to the highest rank of reason and intelligence. Where-

ever there is life, there is some degree of happiness; there are enjoyments suited to the different powers of feeling: and earth, and air, and water, are with magnificent liberality, made to teem with life.

Let those striking displays of creating goodness call forth, on our part, responsive love, gratitude, and veneration. To this great Father of all existence and life, to him who hath raised us up to behold the light of day, and to enjoy all the comforts which his world presents, let our hearts send forth a perpetual hymn of praise. Evening and morning let us celebrate him, who maketh the morning and the evening to rejoice over our heads—who *openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing*. Let us rejoice, that we are brought into a world, which is the production of infinite goodness—over which a supreme intelligence presides—and where nothing happens, that was not planned and arranged, from the beginning, in his decree. Convinced that he hateth not the works which he hath made, nor hath brought creatures into existence, merely to suffer unnecessary pain, let us, even in the midst of sorrow, receive, with calm submission, whatever he is pleased to send—thankful for what he bestows—and satisfied, that, without good reason, he takes nothing away.

Such, in general, are the effects which meditation on the creation of the world ought to produce. It presents such an astonishing conjunction of power, wisdom, and goodness, as cannot be beheld without religious veneration. Accordingly, among all nations of the earth, it has given rise to religious belief and worship. The most ignorant and savage tribes, when they looked round on the earth and the heavens, could not avoid ascribing their origin to some invisible, designing cause, and feeling a propensity to adore. They are, indeed, the awful appearances of the Creator's power, by which, chiefly, they

have been impressed; and which have introduced into their worship so many rites of dark superstition. When the usual course of nature seemed to be interrupted—when loud thunder rolled above them in the clouds, or earthquakes shook the ground—the multitude fell on their knees, and, with trembling horror, brought forth the bloody sacrifice to appease the angry divinity. But it is not in those tremendous appearances of power merely, that a good and well-instructed man beholds the Creator of the world. In the constant and regular working of his hands, in the silent operations of his wisdom and goodness, ever going on throughout nature, he delights to contemplate and adore him.

This is one of the chief fruits to be derived from that more perfect knowledge of the Creator, which is imparted to us by the christian revelation. Impressing our minds with a just sense of all his attributes, as not wise and great only, but as gracious and merciful, let it lead us to view every object of calm and undisturbed nature, with a perpetual reference to its Author. We shall then behold all the scenes, which the heavens and the earth present, with more refined feelings, and sublimer emotions, than they who regard them solely as objects of curiosity, or amusement. Nature will appear animated, and enlivened, by the presence of its Author. When the sun rises or sets in the heavens—when spring paints the earth—when summer shines in its glory—when autumn pours forth its fruits, or winter returns in its awful forms—we shall view the Creator manifesting himself in his works. We shall meet his presence in the fields. We shall feel his influence in the cheering beam. We shall hear his voice in the wind. We shall behold ourselves every where surrounded with the glory of that universal Spirit, who fills, pervades, and upholds all. We shall live in the world as in a great and august temple, where the presence of the divinity, who inhabits it, inspires devotion.

Magnificent as the fabric of the world is, it was not, however, intended for perpetual duration. It was erected as a temporary habitation for a race of beings, who, after acting there a probationary part, were to be removed into a higher state of existence. As there was an hour fixed from all eternity for its creation, so there is an hour fixed for its dissolution—when the heavens and the earth shall pass away, and their place shall know them no more. The consideration of this great event, as the counterpart to the work of creation, shall be the subject of the following discourse.

S E R M O N L.

On the DISSOLUTION of the WORLD.

2 PETER, iii. 10.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.

THESSE words present to us an awful view of the final catastrophe of the world. Having treated, in the preceding discourse, of the commencement, let us now contemplate the close, of all human things. The dissolution of the material system, is an article of our faith, often alluded to in the old testament, clearly predicted in the new. It is an article of faith, so far from being incredible, that many appearances in nature lead to the belief of it. We see all terrestrial substances

changing their form. Nothing, that consists of matter, is formed for perpetual duration. Every thing around us, is impaired and consumed by time; waxes old by degrees; and tends to decay. There is reason, therefore, to believe, that a structure so complex as the world, must be liable to the same law; and shall, at some period undergo the same fate. Through many changes, the earth has already passed; many shocks it has received, and still is often receiving. A great portion of what is now dry land, appears, from various tokens, to have been once covered with water. Continents bear the marks of having been violently rent, and torn asunder from one another. New islands have arisen from the bottom of the ocean—thrown up by the force of subterraneous fire. Formidable earthquakes have, in divers quarters, shaken the globe; and at this hour, terrify, with their alarms, many parts of it. Burning mountains, have, for ages, been discharging torrents of flame; and from time to time renew their explosions, in various regions. All these circumstances show, that in the bowels of the earth, the instruments of its dissolution are formed. To our view, who behold only its surface, it may appear firm and unshaken; while its destruction is preparing in secret. The ground on which we tread, is undermined. Combustible materials are stored. The train is laid. When the mine is to spring, none of us can foresee.

Accustomed to behold the course of nature proceeding in regular order, we indulge, meanwhile, our pleasures and pursuits with full security; and such awful scenes as the convulsion of the elements, and the dissolution of the world, are foreign to our thoughts. Yet, as it is certain that some generation of men must witness this great catastrophe, it is fit and proper that we should sometimes look forward to it. Such prospects may not, indeed, be alluring to the bulk of men. But they carry a gran-

deur and solemnity, which are congenial to some of the most dignified feelings in our nature; and tend to produce elevation of thought. Amidst the circle of levities and follies, of little pleasures and little cares, which fill up the ordinary round of life, it is necessary that we be occasionally excited to attend to what is serious and great. Such events, as are now to be the subject of our meditation, awake the slumbering mind; check the licentiousness of idle thought; and bring home our recollection to what most concerns us, as men and christians.

Let us think what astonishment would have filled our minds, and what devout emotions would have swelled our hearts, if we could have been spectators of the creation of the world—if we had seen the earth, when it arose at first, *without form and void*, and beheld its parts arranged by the divine word—if we had heard the voice of the Almighty, calling light to spring forth from the *darkness that was on the face of the deep*—if we had seen the sun arising, for the first time in the east, with majestic glory—and all nature instantly beginning to teem with life. This wonderful scene, it was impossible that any human eye could behold. It was a spectacle afforded only to angels and superior spirits. But to a spectacle no less astonishing, the final dissolution of the world, we know there shall be many human witnesses. The race of men living in that last age, shall see the presages of the approaching fatal day. There shall be *signs in the Sun*, as the Scripture informs us, *and signs in the moon and stars—upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity—the sea and the waves roaring* *. They shall clearly perceive, that universal nature is tending to ruin. They shall feel the globe shake; shall behold their cities fall, and the final conflagration begin to kindle around them. Realising then this awful scene—imagining ourselves to be already spectators of it, let us,

* Luke, xxi. 25.

I. Contemplate the Supreme Being directing the dissolution, as he directed the original formation of the world. He is the great agent in this wonderful transaction. It was by him foreseen. It was by him intended: it entered into his plan, from the moment of creation. This world was destined, from the beginning, to fulfil a certain period; and then its duration was to terminate. Not that it is any pleasure to the Almighty, to display his omnipotence in destroying the works which he has made: but as, for wise and good purposes the earth was formed; so, for wise and good ends, it is dissolved, when the time most proper for its termination is come. He, who, in the counsels of his Providence, brings about so many revolutions among mankind—who *changeth the times and the seasons*—who raises up empires to rule, in succession, among the nations, and at his pleasure puts an end to their glory—hath also fixed a term for the earth itself, the seat of all human greatness. He saw it meet, that after the probationary course was finished, which the generations of men were to accomplish, their present habitation should be made to pass away. Of the seasonableness of the period, when this change should take place, no being can judge, except the Lord of the universe. These are counsels, into which it is not ours to penetrate. But amidst this great revolution of nature, our comfort is, that it is a revolution brought about by Him, the measures of whose government are all founded in goodness.

It is called in the text, *the day of the Lord*—a day peculiarly his, as known to him only—a day in which he shall appear with uncommon and tremendous majesty. But though it be the day of the terrors of the Lord, yet from these terrors, his upright and faithful subjects shall have nothing to apprehend. They may remain safe and quiet spectators of the threatening scene. For it is not to be a scene of blind confusion—of universal ruin, brought about

by undefigning chance. Over the flock of the elements, and the wreck of nature, Eternal Wisdom presides. According to its direction, the conflagration advances which is to consume the earth. Amidst every convulsion of the world, God shall continue to be, as he was from the beginning, *the dwelling-place of his servants to all generations*. The world may be lost to them; but the ruler of the world is ever the same, unchangeably good and just. This is the *high tower*, to which they can fly and be safe. *The righteous Lord, loveth righteousness: and under every period of his government, his countenance beholdeth the upright.*

II. Let us contemplate the dissolution of the world, as the end of all human glory. This earth has been the theatre of many a great spectacle, and many a high atchievement. There, the wise have ruled, the mighty have fought, and conquerors have triumphed. Its surface has been covered with proud and stately cities. Its temples and palaces have raised their heads to the skies. Its kings and potentates, glorying in their magnificence, have erected pyramids, constructed towers, founded monuments, which they imagined were to defy all the assaults of time. *Their inward thought was, that their houses were to continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations.* Its philosophers have explored the secrets of nature; and flattered themselves, that the fame of their discoveries was to be immortal. Alas! all this was no more than a transient show. Not only *the fashion of the world*, but the world itself *passeth away*. The day cometh, when all the glory of this world shall be remembered, only as *a dream when one awaketh*. No longer shall the earth exhibit any of those scenes which now delight our eyes. The whole beautiful fabric is thrown down, never more to arise. As soon as the destroying angel has sounded the last trumpet, the everlasting mountains fall; the foundations of the world are shaken; the beau-

ties of nature, the decorations of art, the labours of industry, perish, in one common flame. The globe itself shall either return into its ancient chaos, *without form and void*; or, like a star fallen from the heavens, shall be effaced from the universe, and *its place shall know it no more.*

This day of the Lord, it is foretold in the text, *will come as a thief in the night*—that is, sudden and unexpected. Mankind, notwithstanding the pre-
sages given them, shall continue to the last in their wonted security. Our Saviour tells us, that *as in the days of Noah before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be**.—How many projects and designs shall that day suddenly confound! What long-contrived schemes of pleasure shall it overthrow! What plans of cunning and ambition shall it utterly blast! How miserable they, whom it shall overtake in the midst of dark conspiracies, of criminal deeds, or profligate pleasures? In what strong colours is their dismay painted, when they are represented in the book of Revelations, as calling *to the hills and mountains to fall on them and cover them*? Such descriptions are apt to be considered as exaggerated. The impression of those awful events is weakened by the great distance of time, at which our imagination places them. But have not we had a striking image set before us, in our own age, of the terrors which the day of the Lord shall produce, by those partial ruins of the world, which the visitation of God has brought on countries well known, and not removed very far from ourselves? When in the midst of peace, opulence, and security, suddenly the earth was felt by the terrified inhabitants, to tremble, with violent agitation, below them—when their houses began to shake over their heads, and to overwhelm them with ruins—

* Matt. xxiv. 38.

the flood, at the same time, to rise from its bed, and to swell around them—when, encompassed with universal desolation, no friend could aid another—no prospect of escape appeared—no place of refuge remained—how similar were such scenes of destruction to the terrors of the last day! What similar sensations of dread and remorse, and too late repentance, must they have excited among the guilty and profane!

To such formidable convulsions of nature, we, in these happy islands, through the blessing of Heaven, are strangers; and strangers to them may we long continue! But however we may escape partial ruins of the globe, in its general and final ruin, we also must be involved. To us must come at last that awful day, when the sun shall for the last time arise, to perform his concluding circuit round the world. They how blest, whom that day shall find employed in religious acts, or virtuous deeds; in the conscientious discharge of the duties of life; in the exercise of due preparation for the conclusion of human things, and for appearing before the great Judge of the world! Let us now

III. Contemplate the soul of man, as remaining unhurt in the midst of this general desolation, when the whole animal creation perishes, and the whole frame of nature falls into ruins. What a high idea does this present, of the dignity pertaining to the rational spirit. The world may fall back into chaos; but, superior to matter, and independent of all the changes of material things, the soul continues the same. When *the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat*, the soul of man, stamped for immortality, retains its state unimpaired; and is capable of flourishing in undecaying youth and vigour. Very different, indeed, the condition of human spirits is to be, according as their different qualities have marked and prepared them, for different future mansions. But for

futurity, they are all destined. Existence, still is theirs. The capacity of permanent felicity they all possess: and, if they enjoy it not, it is owing to themselves.

Here, then, let us behold what is the true honour and excellence of man. It consists not in his body, which beautiful or vigorous as it may now seem, is no other than a fabric of dust, quickly to return to dust again. It is not derived from any connexion he can form with earthly things, which, as we have seen, are all doomed to perish. It consists in that thinking part, which is susceptible of intellectual improvement and moral worth—which was formed after the image of God—which is capable of perpetual progress in drawing nearer to his nature—and shall partake of the divine eternity, when time and the world shall be no more. This is all that is respectable in man. By this alone, he is raised above perishable substances, and allied to those that are celestial and immortal. This part of our nature, then let us cultivate with care; and, on its improvement, rest our self-estimation. If, on the contrary, suffering ourselves to be wholly immersed in matter, plunged in the dregs of sensuality, we behave as if we were only made for the body and its animal pleasures, how degenerate and base do we become! Destined to survive this whole material system, sent forth to run the race of immortality and glory, shall we thus abuse our Maker's goodness, degrade our original honour, and sink ourselves into deserved misery? It remains, that,

IV. We contemplate the dissolution of the world, as the introduction to a greater and nobler system, in the government of God. *We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness* *. Temporal things are now to give place to things eternal. To this earthly habitation is to succeed the city of the living God. The

* 2 Peter, iii. 13.

earth had completed the purpose for which it was created. It had been employed as a theatre, on which the human generations were successively to come forth, and to fulfil their term of trial. As long as the period of trial continued, much obscurity was of course to cover the counsels of providence. It was appointed, that *all things* should appear as *coming alike to all*—that the righteous should seem often neglected by Heaven, and the wicked be allowed externally to prosper, in order that virtue and piety might undergo a proper test; that it might be shown, who were sincere adherents to conscience, and who were mere followers of fortune. The day, which terminates the duration of the world, terminates all those seeming disorders. The time of trial is concluded. The final discrimination of characters is made. When the righteous go to everlasting happiness—and the wicked are dismissed into the regions of punishment—the whole mystery of human affairs is unravelled: and the conduct of Providence is justified to man.

Suited to a condition of trial was the state and form of the world, which we now inhabit. It was not designed to be a mansion for innocent and happy spirits; but a dwelling for creatures of fallen nature, and of mixed characters. Hence, those mixtures of pleasure and pain, of disorder and beauty, with which it abounds. Hence, some regions of the earth, presenting gay and pleasing scenes—others, exhibiting nothing but ruggedness and deformity—the face of nature, sometimes brightened by a serene atmosphere, and a splendid sun—sometimes disfigured by jarring elements, and overcast with troubled skies. But far unlike shall be the everlasting habitations of the just: though how they are formed, or what objects they contain, is not given us now to conceive—nor, in all probability, would our faculties be equal to the conception. The emblematical descriptions of them in scripture, are calculated to excite high ideas of magnificence

and glory. This one particular we know with certainty, that *therein dwelleth righteousness*; that is, complete virtue and eternal order; and wherever these are found, the most perfect sources are opened of joy and bliss. This earth was never intended for more than the outer court, the porch, through which the righteous were to pass into the temple and sanctuary of the Divinity. *When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.*

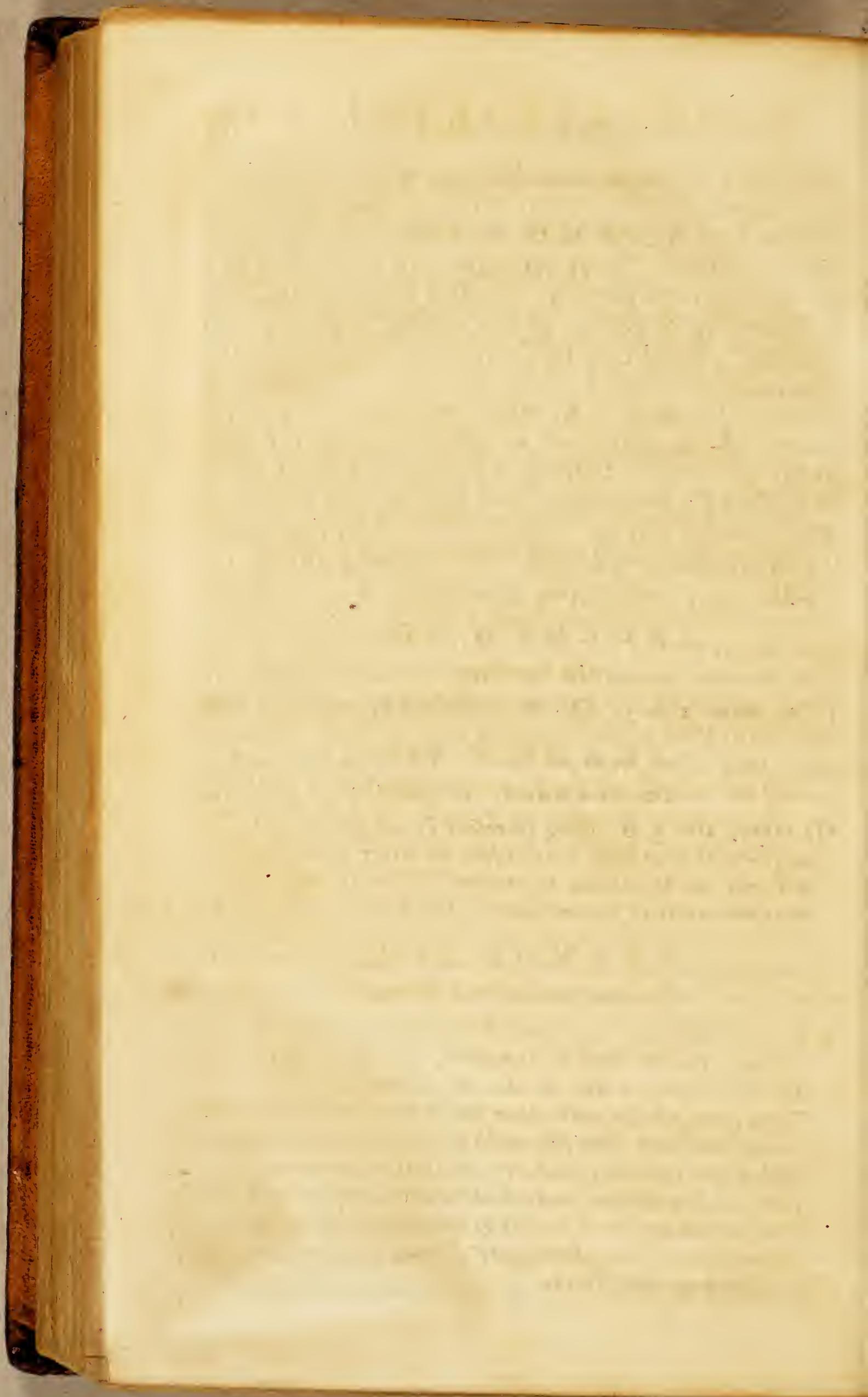
The inference, which follows from what has been said on this subject, cannot be so well expressed as in the words of the apostle, in the verse immediately following the text; *seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?* Ought not the important discoveries, which have been made to us, of the designs of the Almighty, and of the destiny of man, to exalt our sentiments, and to purify our life from what is vicious or vain? While we pursue the business and cares of our present station, and partake of the innocent pleasures which the world affords, let us maintain that dignity of character, which becomes immortal beings; let us act with that circumspection, which becomes those, who know they are soon to stand before the judgment-seat of the Son of God: in a word, let us study to be what we would wish to be found, if to us the day of the Lord should come.

I know it will occur, that the prospect of that day cannot be expected to have much influence on the present age. The events, of which I have treated, must needs, it will be said, belong to some future race of men. Many prophecies yet remain to be fulfilled. Many preparatory events must take place, before the world is ripe for final judgment.—Whether this be the case or not, none of us with certainty know.—But allow me to remind you, that to each of us, an event is approaching, and not far distant, which shall prove of the same effect,

with the coming of the day of the Lord. The day of death is, to every individual, the same as the day of the dissolution of the world. The sun may continue to shine: but to them who are laid in the grave, his light is finally extinguished. The world may remain active, busy, and noisy; but to them, all is silence. The voice, which gives the mandate, *Return again to your dust*, is the same with the sound of the last trumpet. Death fixes the doom of every one, finally and irrevocably. This surely is an event which none of us can remove in our thoughts to a remote age. To-morrow, to-day, the fatal mandate may be issued. *Watch, therefore; be sober, and vigilant; ye know not at what hour the Son of Man cometh.*

Having now treated both of the creation and dissolution of the world, I cannot conclude, without calling your thoughts to the magnificent view, which these events give us, of the kingdom and dominion of the Almighty. With reverence we contemplate his hand in the signal dispensations of Providence among men—deciding the fate of battles—raising up, or overthrowing empires—casting down the proud, and lifting the low from the dust. But what are such occurrences to the power and wisdom, which he displays in the higher revolutions of the universe—by his word, forming or dissolving worlds—at his pleasure, transplanting his creatures from one world to another; that he may carry on new plans of wisdom and goodness, and fill all space with the wonders of creation! Successive generations of men have arisen to possess the earth. By turns they have passed away, and gone into regions unknown. Us he hath raised up, to occupy their room. We, too, shall shortly disappear. But human existence never perishes. Life only changes its form, and is renewed. Creation is ever filling, but never full. When the whole intended course of the generations of men shall be finished,

then, as a shepherd leads his flock from one pasture to another, so the great Creator leads forth the souls which he has made, into new and prepared abodes of life. They go from this earth to a new earth, and new heavens: and still they remove, only from one province of the divine dominion to another. Amidst all those changes of nature, the great Ruler himself remains *without variableness or shadow of turning*. To him, these successive revolutions of being are but *as yesterday when it is past*. From his eternal throne, he beholds worlds rising and passing away—measures out, to the creatures who inhabit them, powers and faculties suited to their state—and distributes among them rewards and punishments, proportioned to their actions.—What an astonishing view do such meditations afford of the kingdom of God—infinite in its extent—everlasting in its duration—exhibiting, in every period, the reign of perfect righteousness and wisdom! *Who by searching can find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection? Great and marvellous are all thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are all thy ways, thou king of saints!*



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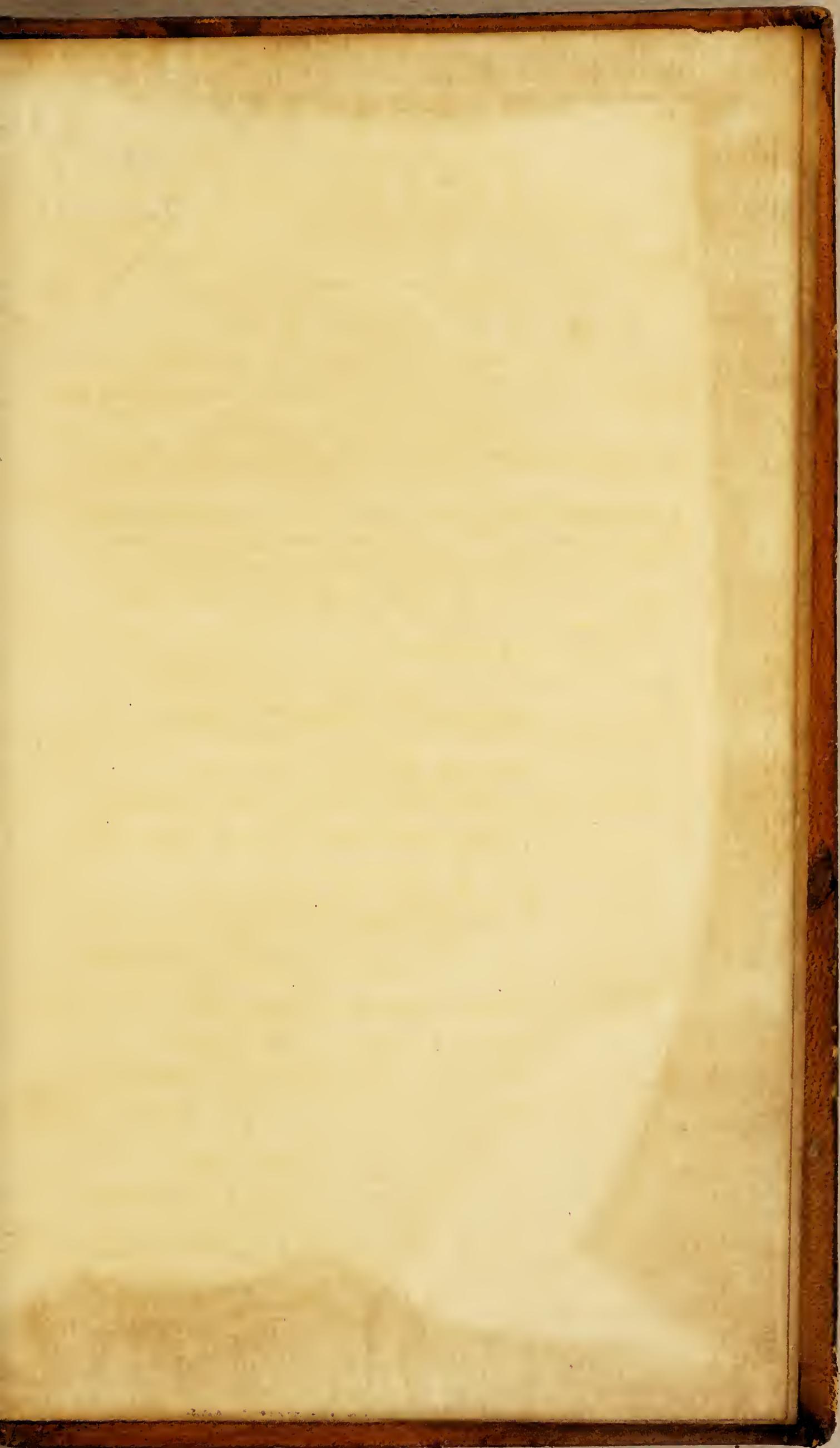
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